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## THE JUGGLER OF NANKIN

### THE GRANDEE'S PLOT.

A Story of the Celestial Empire.

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

[CONTINUED.]

#### CHAPTER XIV.

TSI REPEATS HER EXPERIMENT, AND HAS A WITNESS.



she also noticed that her attendant was very downcast and thoughtful, and she inquired its cause.

"If you know," returned Tsi, "you would not wonder that I am sad. O, I have such dreams during the past night—such strange, terrible dreams, that I have not got over them. It must have been because I slept so much in the afternoon and evening. Of course I must have been restless through the night."

"But what were your dreams?" earnestly inquired the princess.

"I will tell you when we sit down this forenoon. O, they were very strange dreams. Perhaps you can interpret them for me; and who knows but they may be good dreams after all. I hope they may."

"So do I, for your sake," said Niao.

"But one of them was such a marvellous dream," resumed the maid, endeavoring to appear as free as possible. "I dreamed that I made a certain kind of a beverage which I gave to a dog, and the effect was wonderful beyond measure. So strongly did that dream impress me that I have even prepared the drink this morning, and have resolved to catch one of the dogs that belong about the place, and try the effect upon him. Do not think me foolish, lady."

"O, I shall not call you a fool, my good Tsi," returned the princess, with a smile, "but I do think this smacks a little of folly."

"Yet you are willing to try the experiment. I will bring the dog up here and try it in your presence. O, the dream was so vivid."

"You say you have the beverage all prepared?" said the princess.

"Yes. It's a curious compound, and after I have tried the experiment, I will tell you how it was made."

Now the princess knew that Tsi was not one to be idly moved by mere whims, and she felt considerable curiosity to see the strange experiment tried—she felt more curiosity than she would have wished her maid to know of; so as soon as the breakfast things were cleared away, she told her maid that she might go down and get the dog. Tsi hastened away below, and there she found any quantity of small dogs the domestics had collected about the place by means of the waste bits of food they had thrown out. She called one of the smallest of the pack, and without difficulty took it in her arms. It was a very small, red-eyed, white-haired animal, of the lap-dog species, and hastening away to be clear from observation, she took it up to her lady's room.

"I hope your concoction will not hurt the little fellow," said the princess, as she stroked the fine hair of the animal.

"I don't know," returned Tsi, hiding her face; "but surely the ingredients I put in ought not to do him harm."

The maid led the dog with her mistress, and then went and brought the bowl of tea she had set away in her closet. She took the dog in her lap, and the little fellow placed his nose to the beverage, but would not drink. The princess would have argued that the brute should be set at liberty, but her curiosity was now fully excited and she did not interrupt the girl's movements.

As soon as Tsi became satisfied that the dog

would not drink she went to the closet and fetched a spoon, and having secured the animal's legs she placed his head between her knees.

"It is curious," she said, looking up at her mistress, "I think I dreamed that the beverage was not drunk at first. But wait, my lady, and I am sure we shall see some strange result."

As Tsi ceased speaking she commenced to feed the dog from the bowl with her spoon, nor did she stop until half of the tea was gone.

After this she set the animal down and let him run at liberty upon the floor. He did not seem to like the treatment he had received, but after one or two quite savage growls, and an innumerable number of quaint evolutions, he lay down and began to play with the silken tassels of one of the window curtains.

"How long before you think your charm will begin to operate?" asked the princess, with an incredulous smile.

"I cannot tell," returned the girl, watching the dog narrowly. "I am not sure that it will operate at all, but I think it will. If it does not I will never trust to a dream again."

For nearly half an hour the dog lay there and played with the tassels, but at the end of that time he uttered a quick, low whine, and stretched himself out at full length upon the carpet.

For a few moments he remained in that position, and then he sprang to his feet and darted across the room. After this he made several circles in his movements, and once more he lay down upon the carpet. His eyes were very bright, and they were fixed on the girl who had given him the drink, with a wild, glaring gaze.

"It begins its work," whispered Tsi, with a shudder.

"It surely does," answered the princess, gazing fixedly on the dog. "But do you not think he suffers?"

Tsi made no reply, for her attention was now wholly taken up by the dog. The little fellow had reached his fore paws forward to their full extent, and his head was resting sideways upon them. It could be seen that his breathing was short, quick and weak, and that his eyes were losing their brightness. Once he made a motion as though he would have arisen, but the effort failed. His limbs were now drawn up, and the motion of his chest grew less and less. There was another white—no more movement of the head from side to side—a convulsive heaving of the breast—a nervous gathering up of the feet, and a low struggle, as though he were trying to hold upon his departing breath. A moment he remained thus, and then there was a sudden relaxation of his muscles—his head dropped, he rolled over upon his side, and with one or two slight movements of his sides he settled into rest. There was no more movement—no more gazing of the eyes, for they were half closed and lead-like. The princess started from her chair and approached the spot, and with her foot she moved the inanimate body, but there were no signs of life. Then she stooped down and raised the animal's head in her hands, and a moment's gaze gave a truth to her mind.

"Tsi," she said, in a sad tone, "the dog is dead."

The maid covered her face with her hands, but made no reply.

"It was a cruel experiment," the princess continued, "for I would not harm even a dog. I am sorry you did it, but it cannot be helped now, so you need not mourn over it. Come—I did not mean to chide you. I do not blame you, good Tsi. Do not let it affect you so."

The girl raised her head and looked into her lady's face.

"Come," resumed Niao, in a kind, persuasive tone, "you need not feel bad about it, but tell me now what was your dream?"

"O, it was a terrible dream," uttered Tsi, again covering her face, and shuddering.

"But what was the nature of the drink you prepared?"

"Wait a moment, and I will tell you," said the girl. She looked up as she spoke, and after gazing for a moment upon her mistress she looked upon the dog. She was evidently trying to gather strength for the task before her. She

was determined to hold the fearful secret no longer, for it was now time that the whole should be known.

"Lady," she said, moving close up to her mistress, and speaking almost in a whisper, "you must prepare your soul for a story that will come upon you terribly. Since we have been in this house I have watched every movement. I slept last evening so that I might watch through the night. I did watch. That bowl which stands there upon the table is the same one which I carried into your chamber when you retired last night."

The princess stretched forth her hand and laid it upon her companion's arm.

"I drank from that bowl!" she whispered, turning pale as death.

"No," quickly returned Tsi. "You have not tasted that beverage. I changed your bowl before you drank. There was danger about you, but my eye was not removed from you till you were safe."

Niao trembled violently, but the color came back to her face. For some moments she gazed into her companion's face without speaking. She seemed to be fearful of trusting her speech.

She dared not ask the question that trembled upon her lips, for she was fearful that the truth might be more dreadful than the suspicion she already tried to entertain. She tried to think of some one whom she had wronged, and who might thus be led to seek revenge, but she could not remember of a living being who had ever received wrong at her hands.

"Tsi," she at length said, with all the power she could command, "tell me what you have seen."

"You are strong—and will not sink beneath the knowledge, for you are safe."

"Speak on, I am ready."

Tsi hesitated but for a moment, and then she told what she had seen on the first night—of the departure of a man from the chamber—of her suspicions respecting the tea, and of her subsequent experiment upon the comorant. Then she told of all that she had seen on the night last past, save that she did not mention the name of the man who had done the deed.

"I removed the tea as soon as I could," she said in conclusion, "and in its place I put some which I had prepared for the purpose. I kept the beverage which I took from your side, for I was resolved that there should be no room for doubt. You have seen its power, and you know what would have been the result had you drunk it."

The princess was not thunder-struck, nor was she filled with terror. She seemed to have no feeling beyond a dull, painful fear—a fear that seemed rather to suspend mental action and leave a chill upon the soul.

"You saw not the man's features?" she at length whispered, gazing half timidly up into her companion's face.

"Yes, I saw them plainly."

"Ah. Did you recognize them?"

"Yes."

"And were not mistaken?"

"There was no room for mistake, for the rays of the light shone full upon them."

"Could you tell me who it was?"

"If you would wish to know."

"Tell me."

"It was—the Prince Kong-ti!"

"My husband?"

"Yes."

"There could be no mistake?"

"No, mistake were impossible. It was he who poisoned your tea, and whom I afterwards heard conversing with Li beneath the window of this room."

The princess arose from her chair and stood over her maid. There was at first something almost like a smile upon her lips, but in a moment more 'twas gone, and the features grew rigid as marble. She laid her hands upon Tsi's head, and attempted to speak, but could not. Then a low, sharp cry broke from her lips, and she sank down upon the floor utterly insensible. The faithful maid sprang to her side and lifted her up, and with considerable exertion she raised her upon a silken couch that stood beneath the window. She did not call for help, for she dared not trust the secret with others, so she resolved to do the work of resuscitation herself.

After she had placed her mistress upon the couch she hastened for water, and by repeated exertions she at length succeeded in bringing the unfortunate woman back to life. Niao opened her eyes and looked up, and made signs to be raised to a sitting posture. After this she gazed upon her attendant with a wild, haggard look.

"Are you better?" asked Tsi, still bathing the lady's temples.

"Better!" repeated the princess, casting her eyes slowly about the room, as though she sought something which she had not yet forgotten. They at length rested upon the body of the

ill-fated dog. "It is all real!" she continued, speaking in a hoarse whisper. "I heard it all right. There was poison, Tsi—poison in my drink—and my husband put it there!"

"He did, most surely," said the maid, bending down and smoothing back the hair from the sufferer's pale brow. "And now we must act. As soon as you can grow calm we will think the matter over. Of course you now know that the prince wishes you out of the way."

"Yes. He loves another!" groaned the heart-stricken wife.

"Perhaps he does. But let that pass now. Do you not think it would be best to flee from this place as soon as possible? You know the prince's power, and you know now what his will is in regard to yourself. If you can make your escape you may at least live."

It was something before the princess spoke, but when she did speak she had grown more calm, and her voice, though weak and low, was yet firm and decided.

"Alas, my good, faithful friend," she said, "I have saved me, and to your judgment I will trust. Do as you think best, and I shall not object. I have nothing to live for now, but was given me as a blessing by a power I dare not thwart, and I will not throw it away. Though all is dark as the grave to me now, and though the remainder of my life must be spent in the valley of sorrow and sadness, yet I would not die, but I will live and pray for him who has so basely wronged me. What shall we do?"

"I will tell you," replied the maid, who was much relieved at finding her mistress so calm.

"All day yesterday, Li was watching you most nervously, and he was most assuredly looking for the effect of the poison that had been placed by your bedside. This morning he came to me and wished to see you, but I told him you had not yet arisen, and rather gave him to understand that you were not well. Now there will evidently be a watch set upon you to day. You shall retire to your bed, and if you are called for, I will state that you are not well enough to be seen. I will give out that you are seized with a wonderful malady, and that the very sight of visitors turns your brain. If we can thus keep matters along until to-night, we will take the cover of the darkness and flee."

The princess promised to be governed entirely by the faithful Tsi's will, and shortly afterwards she allowed herself to be undressed and assisted to her bed. After this the maid concealed the body of the dog, and then set about preparing for the object she had in view.

During the forenoon three messengers arrived at different times from Nankin to inquire after the health of the princess, and to each one Tsi gave the same answer: "Her mistress could not be seen, for she was very sick. Towards the middle of the afternoon the prince himself came, and to him Tsi gave the same answer."

"You had better not think of seeing my poor lady," she urged, tearing her hair in great grief, "for the very sight of any one makes her worse. Perhaps in the morning she may be better. Will you not come then?"

"The day was not very strenuous. He tried to make it appear that he wept, and after hiding the girl he very carefully and attentively took his leave."

The day wore slowly away, and when the shades of night had fairly settled around the great building Tsi sought the side of her mistress. Niao was very calm now, and she arose from her bed and put on the garb of a fisherman's companion had procured. Tsi was clothed in a dress of the same description, and thus disguised they moved out into the drawing-room. Here Niao took what money she had, and then noiselessly followed her maid from the apartment. They reached the hall without notice, and with quickly beating hearts they crept through an open window upon the low verandah, and from thence they stepped down into the garden.

The stars were shining brightly in the clear heavens, and the fresh breeze was playing mildly with the flower-decked foliage. The two women noticed not the dampness that came up chill from the marsh—they only bent their ears eagerly for a few moments to be assured that no one watched them from behind the door that the way was clear ahead, and then they glided swiftly away by one of the hedge-grown walks that led towards the road.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### AN UNLUCKY TRADE.

On the next morning after Paul had landed from the diamond vessel he arose very early, and having obtained from Yu-la a promise that she would not leave the room until he came back he went forth to see if he could find suitable horses for his journey. Anything, almost, with fair strength, would answer for himself, but he wanted an easy, gentle beast for Yu-la. He

went out first into the stable, but he found nothing there for sale. The man, however who had charge of the place, and who, for a wonder, was awake, directed him to the house of a man who would be likely to have some beasts for sale, and at the same time gave the information that said man, whose name was Fou-chang, was the only person in the place who kept horses.

The house was pointed out to our hero, it being in sight, and about half a mile distant, and with quick steps he hastened away. He was not long in reaching the place, and as he approached the open yard in front of the building he saw a man holding two horses by the bridles.

"Is this Fou-chang?" asked the youth, as he came up and looked, first at the two horses, and then at him who held them. The animals were good-looking beasts, and took our hero's eye at once.

"Suppose I am Fou-chang?" returned the man, eying Paul sharply.

"Why, I have been directed to you as one who might sell me horses."

"Ah, yes. And how many would you want?"

"Two will answer."

"Well, I've got horses. Here's two, for instance. If you want them very much, perhaps I might accommodate you."

"I do want them very much, and I should like them at once. Are these animals kind?"

"One of them is. That one, now, a woman could ride—just the most gentle creature living."

"Just what I want. I want one for myself, and one for a boy who is with me."

"Well, there isn't much difference between a boy and a woman as far as horses are concerned," said the man, with something like a smile upon his features. "But suppose we can trade, when should you want them?"

"Immediately."

"Then you want to be on the road at once?"

"Yes. The horses will evidently suit, and you may set your price."

"O, you'd better try them first. Never make a blind bargain, sir, especially in horse-flesh. Now suppose you just mount this one—the kindest one, and I'll take the other—you came from the inn?"

"Yes."

"Well, we'll ride down there, and that will tell you something what they are. Just you hold the reins while I run in and tell the folks where I am going."

Paul took charge of the horses, and the man hurried into the house, but he soon returned, and then our hero mounted the animal which had been pointed out to him as the most kind and gentle. He found the beast to be all he could wish, and he could not but congratulate himself on the success of his errand for he was resolved to try both the horses let the price be what it might, knowing that he could sell them again at Shanghai.

When they reached the door of the inn Paul dismounted, and the horse-dealer led the same.

"I will take them if your price is not too exorbitant," the youth said.

"O, there won't be any trouble about the price," returned the other. "But suppose your boy comes out and tries his beast! Then you'll be sure, you know."

"Never mind that," said Paul, rather tartly, for he began to be anxious to get rid of the fellow. "I want the horses, and if you will sell them I will buy them."

"Certainly I'll sell them. For that which you rode I want three golden ounces, and for the other I want two golden ounces and five pieces of silver."

Paul at once accepted the offer, and having paid the money, he led the horses around to the stable, and there gave orders for them to be kept in readiness, as he should want them in a very short time. He took no more notice of the fellow of whom he had bought the animals, but as soon as he had seen them safely cared for, he hastened to the room where he had left Yu-la. He found her there, but she was pale as marble, and trembled fearfully.

"Yu-la—my love—what has happened?" cried the youth, springing forward and laying his hand upon the maiden's arm.

"Lost! Lost!" she groaned. "O, Paul, my own dear Paul, we are in terror. He saw that Yu-la could have no groundless fears, and his own heart began to sink within him."

"What is it?" he asked. "What has happened since I have been away?"

"Li! Li is here!" she replied, gazing furtively about as she spoke.

"Li here?" repeated Paul. "Do you mean the prince's own man?"

"Yes. He is Kong-ti's only male confidant. O, Paul, you did not know him!"

"I have not seen him."

"Not seen him?" uttered Yu-la, gazing up in astonishment. "That was he who rode by your side!"

"What! but now?"

"Yes."

"And of him I bought the horses—and to him I spoke of my boy!" groaned the youth, sinking into a chair. "But," he added, in a moment afterwards, "perhaps he does not know me."

But such a hope was not long to remain with Paul Arden, for he well remembered how the man had eyed him, and how he had hung about him. Yet that circumstance, be it as it might, could have no effect. He must escape from the place as quickly as possible, and that, too, without being seen by Li, for he would surely recognize Li if he were to see his face. His greatest fear was, that he should not be able to get at his horses, for he had reason to believe that Li was watching in the stable. He told his thoughts to his companion, and she urged him to flee from the place at once.

Paul pondered upon the subject a few moments, and then he crept out into the narrow hall, for from the back window of this place he could see the stable. He looked out and saw Li still standing there, and he could now see that the fellow was anxiously watching for something. He saw at once that to attempt to obtain his horses would be not only useless but really dangerous, so he returned to Yu-li and bade her prepare at once to set off.

"It is no use," he said, "to think of obtaining our beasts, for Li is on the watch there. We must glide carefully out at the front door, and hasten off towards the wood which flanks the edge of the lake beyond the little river. Perhaps we may yet escape."

Yu-li made no reply, but with quick movements she prepared herself, and in a few moments she was ready. The youth examined his pistols very carefully, and having seen that the caps were dry and clean, and that the tubes were filled, he placed them so that they could be easily reached, and then moved carefully out into the narrow hall. Yu-li clung closely to his arm, and he could almost hear the quick beating of her heart, for he plainly felt its pulsations against his arm. He looked down the steep, ladder-like stairs, and saw that the way was clear.

"Courage," he whispered, as he began to descend the stairs, "let us hope for the best, but have our hearts prepared for the worst. If we can only get clear from this house."

"I am strong," returned Yu-li. "Look only to yourself, and lead the way."

Paul returned a look of gratitude, and with a steady step he kept on. The lower hall was reached, and yet they were alone and unobserved.

The yard was clear, and the two stepped forth from the door. The stable was back of the house, so that they could not be seen from that source, and if Li only remained by the horses, as he probably would, the chances of escape were almost equal with those of detection. The road, which was only a few yards from the house, was flanked by hedges of yellow rose-trees, and under cover of this hedge Paul hoped to make his way. A single instant he stopped in the part of the yard that he was not noticed, and then he glided forth to the road. The hedge was reached, and keeping close beneath it the fugitives hastened on. The path that led to the river was reached, the river itself was crossed, and in fifteen minutes more they were under cover of the thick wood that lined a section of the shore of the lake. Here they stopped to take breath and listen, but no following footsteps were heard.

Paul considered a few moments upon the subject of the direction he should take. He saw a path that led up through the woods from the lake, but he dared not take it, for in case of pursuit that path would be sure to be followed, so he struck off through the trackless wild, taking his course about northeast. There was little underbrush, and with care they made comparatively easy progress. At the distance of about five miles they came to an open section through which ran the imperial canal. They had to walk over a mile before they found a bridge by which they could cross, and after crossing this they had no more woods to conceal them, save now and then a clump of tall trees that were cultivated by the neighboring peasants. A number of low huts were seen scattered about over the even country, but Paul chose not to trust to any of them for shelter, hoping that he might find some safer retreat before noon.

Nearly three hours must now have elapsed since they left the inn, and Paul judged that he was at least ten miles from the place of departure, but the way ahead looked not so inviting as he could have wished, for the whole country, for miles around, was nearly level, and even were he to leave the road and strike off into the fields, it would not avail him anything towards concealment. But with a brave heart he kept on, and Yu-li assured him that she was not yet fatigued.

Another hour passed, and yet no pursuers were seen, and Paul almost began to hope that there might have been some mistake.

"Yu-li," he said, "are you sure that it was Li whom you saw at the inn this morning?"

"Of course I am," the maiden replied. "There is no mistaking him."

"I had feared we should have been followed ever since, if such had been the case."

"It was surely Li," Yu-li repeated. "But," she added, with a sudden burst of hope, "perhaps he did not, after all, hold any suspicions concerning you."

"Perhaps not," added Paul. "And yet," he continued, in a thoughtful mood, "why should he have sold me the horses? A man in his position would not surely be trading horses about the country. If that was Li he must surely have had some suspicion. The intelligence of our flight could only have reached the woman."

"We must rest," said Paul. "The woman, Lan, and of course the pursuers would have a description of my person. They must be after us ere this, but have probably taken the wrong track."

Just as Paul ceased speaking a sharp cry broke from Yu-li, and with a trembling motion she pointed towards the west. The youth looked back and saw two horsemen on the same road he had crossed. They were at least five miles distant, and though they seemed but mere moving

spots, yet there was no doubt that they were horsemen. Paul knew that himself and companion could not be seen at that distance, and there was yet time for concealment. At the distance of less than a quarter of a mile, and standing some rods from the road, there was a peasant's cot. It was only a few paces from the road, and possibly be reached in season, for the horsemen were surely on the road they were travelling, and towards that cot they started. When they reached it they found no one there save an old woman, who informed them that her husband and son, the only other occupants, were at a distant garden by the canal at work in a tea-plot.

"I am, in time for extended consideration, and he knew that the woman would be governed more rigidly by gratitude than by any fear that could be forced upon her."

"My good woman," he said, speaking frankly and quickly, "we are two unfortunate people who have had the misfortune to be persecuted because we helped to rescue a poor girl from the hands of a villain. We are even now pursued. Give us shelter, and save us from the villains who would capture us, and your reward shall be ample. We will give you gold—four pieces of bright, pure gold."

The woman's eyes sparkled, and she put forth her shrivelled hand. Paul valued not the gold, but he would be sure of the woman's meaning before he gave it to her.

"Will you trust me as I ask?" he asked.

"Yes," the woman returned.

"And if our enemies should come and inquire for us, what would you tell them?"

"That would depend upon what kind of men they were, and how they should ask. For four golden pieces I can afford to tell a lie, for then I can pay for Buddha's pardon."

Paul was satisfied that the woman meant to do the best she could, and without further questioning he asked her to lead the way to a place of concealment. She thought a few moments, and then she went to a place in the floor where there was a joint in the rough boards, and raised a small trap-door.

"Here," she said, "is a small cellar under here which we use for keeping fowl. As soon as you are down I will pull an old reel over the place, and they will never find it, for I don't know of another such place about here."

There was a rough ladder led down to the bottom of the place, and having descended first himself, Paul turned and assisted his companion. The door was then replaced, and then our hero heard the mad drawn over. It was utterly dark there, but by no means damp or uncomfortable. Our two fugitives found places to sit down, and ere long afterwards they heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the yard. Soon there came the tramp of feet upon the floor overhead—the feet of two men, certainly—and Paul and Yu-li could hear every word plainly. The first speaker was at first recognized as Li.

"Hi, woman," he cried, "have you seen two persons go by here this morning?"

"Yes, I think there have been a number by," returned the woman.

"Ah, who were they?"

"Some folks that work down by the canal."

"But have you seen none go the other way? Haven't you seen two people—a young man and a boy—go the other way?"

"No, sir."

"Yes, I think there have not any such called here."

"Yes, there were two such called here about an hour ago. They stopped and got some water, and then went off towards the great river."

"Towards Kiang-yin?"

"No. They left the road, and crossed the marsh, back of us here, and kept on to the northward."

"Yes, I think there have not any such called here."

"Yes, and looked very tired. Poor folks! If you could overtake them and give them a ride 'twould be a blessing, for they looked like innocent youths."

"Innocent like snakes!" growled Li.

"But they weren't surely wicked people," said the old woman, with perfect assurance.

"No mind," said Li. "Right off to the northward, you say?"

"Yes. Across the marsh by the left hand path. They must be half way to the river by this time. They are not going yet."

"Yes, my good woman."

"But stop and eat something."

"No."

"I've got some wine."

"We will take a bit of that."

"That's right," said the woman, arising and moving across the floor. "Poor dear youths! They wanted me, if any body came and inquired after them, to detain 'em as long as I could."

"They did, eh?" cried Li. "But never mind. Hurry with your wine, and we'll make up for the lost time."

The wine was soon brought, and quickly drank, and in a few moments more Paul heard the horses gallop away. As soon as the sound died away in the distance the trap-door was raised, and Paul and his companion came up. He thanked the old woman for the service she had done him, and after paying her the gold he had promised, he asked for some kind of refreshment. This she brought quickly forward and placed upon a small table where the wine already stood, and Paul and Yu-li sat down.

"Hi-ya! There are three paths up the marsh, old woman. Which one did—"

The voice stopped short. Paul leaped from his chair, and saw Li standing at the window! Quick as thought he snatched a pistol from his bosom, and raised it, but Li detected the movement and dodged out of sight.

"We were lost!" groaned Yu-li, clinging half-frantically to her lover's bosom.

"Not yet," uttered Paul. "Courage, dear-est. Let me have my arms free."

Yu-li sprang back, for she saw that she was encumbering her lover's arms, and on the next instant the door that led to the entry was open to open just a crack. Paul would have darted back and saw two horsemen on the same road he had crossed. They were at least five miles distant, and though they seemed but mere moving

ing, burning sensation, and while he strained his eyes towards the door a thousand varied lights seemed dancing before him. He staggered forward a few paces, and then he knew that Yu-li had caught him in her arms.

"Paul! Paul!" she cried. "Speak to me—O, speak!"

But he could utter no words. He had a dim sense of pain in his head, and a faint confusion of soft arms clasping him about. Again he heard the sound of that sweet voice in his ear, and then he knew that he was sinking down upon the floor. Another quick succession of sparkling lights seemed to flash before his eyes, and after that everything was dark and cold.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### IN PRISON.

WHEN Paul Arden came to himself he was in a very small place, and the light came to him through a grated door. The walls of the room were of wood, and the ceiling and floor were of the same material. He knew that he was in a prison, and from the dim that came rumbling through the air he concluded that he must be in a large city. His first movement, as soon as he had fully recovered his senses, was to feel of his head, for he felt a dull pain there. He found it bandaged, and after considerable reflection and examination he found that he was not seriously injured. He remembered the firing of the pistol through the crack of the door, and of the subsequent sensations he had experienced. The ball must have hit his skull just above and back of the temple, and glanced off without penetrating the bone. There must have been considerable concussion, but Paul knew from the sensations he experienced that he was in no danger. As soon as his mind was satisfied upon this point he turned his attention to other matters.

At first there came a sort of dream-like vision before him, and when his mind struggled forth into the reality he remembered the maiden who had been with him during his exciting flight. With both hands pressed hard upon his brow he sat back upon the little frame that served him as a bed, and sobbed deeply. Physical weakness had taken much of his strength of nerve, and his bitter sorrow ran riot in his soul. He thought of Yu-li—of how she had smiled upon and trusted him—of how she had shone like a torch of heaven in his path—and he felt how much he had lost. He remembered—felt how mighty was his love for that gentle being—how it had penetrated every avenue of his thoughts and feelings—how it had entered into his very life, and become part of his soul. He thought of all this, and after wretchedness overwhelmed him with an angry sea. He was sunk in a darkness so dense and deep that not even a thought of day came to bless him. If his thoughts did at length turn to where hope should have been a home, he thought only of the almost unlimited power of him who had stricken him.

It might have been half an hour after Paul had fully recovered himself that he heard footsteps approaching his cell, and ere long an armed soldier stopped in front of the grated door and looked in. He was a filthy, grey-looking fellow, and on his shoulder he carried a gun-like contrivance that might at first sight have been taken for a small cannon which had been rusted down to about half its original size, and then set in a stock.

"Hi!" the fellow exclaimed, setting down his heavy piece of ordnance, and looking in upon the youth. "So you're up again. What time you've had."

Paul arose from his couch and approached the door, and the Chinaman made a motion as though he would bring his weapon to a favorable position for shooting.

"Where am I?" was Paul's first question.

"In prison, I think," replied the guard.

"But in what place?"

"Close by the canal of Yang-tch'i."

"But am I in Nankin?"

"Yes."

"And how long have I been here?"

"The third day," said the fellow, after counting the great yellow buttons upon his vest.

"Has the prince seen me?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what he means to do with me?"

The fellow grinned a sort of grim, dubious grin, and shook his head like a gum-crook, and that was all the answer he gave. Paul repeated the question, but it was only answered by another shrug of the head. A third time he asked the same question, and this time the Chinaman seemed indignant that his silent answer had not been understood, for with an angry grunt he bobbed his head once more, and then drew his hand significantly across his throat. He stopped just long enough to see that he was now understood, and then moved along.

After the sentinel was gone, Paul went back to his couch and sat down. He now knew the fate that was intended for him, but it was not the coming of death that moved him the most. The dread of the executioner was overcome by another emotion. He could only see the pale face of Yu-li, and think that she, too, was suffering. After a while the youth went to the door and looked out through the grated aperture. He could see that he was some distance from the ground, and that opposite to him, about a dozen yards distant, was a blank, massive wall. He had seen many Chinese prisons, where all the cells looked into a common yard, and he knew that he was now in no common prison, for he was cut off from the graces of his fellows, save the single entry that greeted him, and it was evidently intended that he should have no opportunity for communication. It was surely a dismal prospect.

It must have been late in the afternoon when reason had come to Paul's mind, for ere long after he had left the door the shades of night began to settle over the prison, and just at the time when the dark begins to grow thicker with darkness the sentinel stopped at the door and

handed in a bottle and a cake of rice bread. The former he found to contain water, and the bread he was obliged to soak before he could eat it, and even then it was fulsome stuff. He only forced down what nature actually required, and then he considered upon the floor. He had hardly taken his seat upon the edge of the cot ere he heard the sound of steps approaching his cell, and shortly afterwards his door was opened. The last glimmer of evening just revealed the outlines of the intruder, and in the tall straight form that stood against the background of space made by the open door, Paul recognized the Juggler of Nankin.

"Is this Paul Arden?" the juggler asked, as he approached the cot.

The prisoner answered in the affirmative. He spoke tremblingly, for he felt like one who had done wrong, and for the first time the juggler came to him that his having evaded the thought was the direct cause of all he had since suffered.

"Do you remember when you stopped at the small inn on the western shore of the Tai-hou lake?"

"Yes," returned the youth.

"You had a boy with you?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that I was there at the same time?"

Paul hesitated for a moment, but it was not his nature to deliberately falsify, and he admitted the truth.

"Then you saw me, and went away on purpose to escape me?" said Yu-fu-hi.

"I confess that I did."

"Alas, Paul, you know not what you have done!" The old man spoke in a very strange, sad, tone, and as he spoke he sat down upon the cot by Paul's side. "Do you not remember the promise you made me?" he continued.

"Do you not remember the compact you made with me?"

"Yes."

"Then why should you have fled from me?"

"Because I feared you," answered the youth, after a moment's thought.

"Feared me! And what have I ever done that you should fear me? What have I said in your presence, or what suggested, that could have awakened such a thought in your bosom?"

"I cannot explain, sir," replied Paul, with evident embarrassment. "I can only tell you that I saw you come into the yard, and that both I and my companion feared you. For myself, sir, I should have had no fear, but for another's sake I even broke my promise with you—for that other's sake I would have even given up life itself for your mishap," said Yu-fu-hi.

"I have heard of your mishap," said Yu-fu-hi, "and I know whom you had with you."

"You do!" uttered Paul, starting up with excitement.

"Yes."

"And can you tell me what has become of my companion?"

"She is with the Prince of Nankin."

Paul Arden only groaned aloud, and sank back upon the cot. He covered his face with his hands, and the old man could hear that he was sobbing heavily.

"Paul," spoke the juggler, at the same time laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "you have wronged me most deeply, but I will not chide you, for I know how much you now suffer. When I set you to watch over the movements of the prince, I hoped you would be faithful to the trust I reposed in you. Had you done that, all would have been well. I could have led you clear from all danger, and you should have lost nothing that you could have hoped to gain. It was a hold upon the prince I wanted, and even had I gained possession of the maiden you found, and even had I led her into the very presence of the prince, you should not have lost her."

"O, sir! Can you not save her now?" cried Paul, springing up and clasping his hands.

"I do not know. The prince is very powerful, and he now holds the maiden in his own hands. His own wife, I have heard, is dead. If he makes Yu-li his wife your hopes of her are gone."

"O, heaven have mercy!"

"And then your own situation is not at all enviable," resumed the juggler.

Paul started at the words, and for a while his mind was drawn to the subject thus broached.

"Do you know what my fate is to be?" he whispered.

"It is not hard to guess," returned the other.

"You are placed here to die. I know well what silent language these walls speak. When you are led forth from here it will be to die, and you will have but little warning of the coming fate."

"And is there no power to save me?" the youth asked.

"O, if you could but get word to my countrymen at Shanghai, they would come and take me away. Can you not send them intelligence of my situation?"

"It would take nearly a week, at least, to bring the English here," the juggler said, "and your fate will surely be decided before that time. But let that rest for the present. I will help you if I can. I have gained admittance here by working upon the superstition of the guard, but I could not get you out, for the poor soldiers will not sacrifice their lives even to me. But for all that I may help you. Now tell me of what you found at the temples. Of course you cannot fail to trust me now."

Paul knew full well that no harm could come of his revealing the truth to his companion, and he hoped that if he was frank now it might work to his own good, so he commenced and related all that he had seen and done at the ruined temples, even to his first interview with Yu-li, and the growing of the love which had taken such a hold upon his heart. He could not see the juggler's face, but he could tell that he was much affected, for ever and anon sharp, ejaculatory sentences would break from his lips.

"Kong-i is a great villain!" uttered Yu-fu-hi, after Paul had concluded. "O, I wish you had trusted me, for then we might have thwarted him."

"Do not blame me," groaned the youth. "It was for Yu-li's sake I acted as I did, for she

feared you. We both of us had an instinctive fear that to answer your own ends you might place her again within grasp of the wicked prince."

"It is passed now," resumed the juggler, "and we must do the best we can. I do truly wish to save you, and I will if I can."

"And Yu-li?" whispered Paul.

"If the Princess Niao lives I can save her, but if the princess be truly dead, then I fear there is little hope. But we must trust to time."

"Do you know Yu-li?" the youth asked.

"I have seen her."

"And do you know the princess?"

"Well."

"The princess is related to you?"

"Ah, who told you that?"

"I heard it so whispered."

"I meant not that such a fact should have leaked out. But it can make no difference now. Niao is a noble woman, and she has been most wrongly wronged, and if it lies in my power she shall be revenged."

"Are you going to leave me?"

"I must, for my time has expired. But do not give up in total despair, for I think I can save your life. If it came within the reach of my power, even though half the soldiers in Nankin died in consequence, I would lead you forth from here now; but I cannot. The guard is very strong and resolute, and they are not to be overcome by any act of mine. Be assured that I will not lose sight of you."

Paul started up from the cot and seized the juggler by the arm.

"Save Yu-li if you can!" he cried, with all the energy of his soul. "O, save her, and then my own liberty will be worth the having."

"You may hope for yourself," returned Yu-fu-hi.

"But Yu-li is more than myself. She is the light of my soul—the joy of my heart, and without light and joy life were but little else than a burden."

The juggler made no reply. Paul would have given much to have seen his face even, but the darkness hid it, and his emotions were all hid, and in a moment more the youth was alone. He heard the retreating footsteps of his visitor, and when they at length died away he threw himself upon his hard couch. For a while he pondered upon what had passed, but he did not ponder long, for the emotions he had experienced worked hard upon his mind, and weakness overcame him. His sorrows and his cares were lost in unconsciousness. He felt a wild, dizzy sensation, but no pain, and with the attempt to grasp a phantom which imagination had hung in the air before him, he sank back into the rest of forgetfulness.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE PLOT IS ON ITS LEGS AGAIN.

THE PRINCE of Nankin walked up and down his apartment with quick, nervous strides. He was much agitated, and a casual observer would have needed no interpreter to tell that the powerful grandee was suffering from more than usual anxiety. His face was pale, and his lips were compressed with a powerful effort to keep back the feelings that welled up from his soul. The beautiful Yu-li was once more in his power, but he was far from satisfied with the position in which he was placed. His plot had been interrupted—had not worked to his advantage. A few days ago, and he thought his plans were all moving smoothly on, but now a storm had come, and the fabric of his long cherished plot was in danger of tumbling in pieces about his ears. He still held the tottering fragments up, but they were hard upon him.

Thus was he pacing to and fro across his apartment, when Li entered his presence. He stopped as soon as he noticed his devoted servant and started towards him.

"Ha! Back so soon?" he uttered.

"Yes," returned Li, moving to a seat and placing his body in it.

"And what of Niao? Have you gained any trace of her?"

"Yes."

"The prince started at this answer—a quick flush sufficed his face, and then he also sat down."

"Speak," he said, in breathless anxiety.

"Tell me what you have learned."

"Last night," commenced Li, "I went to the house where we left her, but none of the servants had heard from her. I searched through the neighborhood most of the night, and when I returned to the house this morning a letter had been left there for you. No one knew who left it, or at what hour it was left. It was found tied to the handle of the outer door by the porter, and he gave it to me. It was not sealed, and I read it, and I thought it best to place it in your hands as soon as possible."

As Li ceased speaking he drew the letter from his pocket and handed it to his master. It was written upon a piece of silk with India ink. The prince opened it and read as follows:

"To the good friend and mighty Prince Kong-i—"

The good Princess Niao is dead! The very night after you last saw her she was seized upon by an evil spirit which stole away her reason. In this mood she arose from her bed and rushed from the house. I followed her, but she would not listen. She went to the great lake, and there she saved as one having a heavy soul, nor would she suffer me to approach her. She spoke to Tien-tan to take her spirit, and to Tien-tan she gave her body. She threw herself into the lake, and the dark waters closed over her. We shall see her no more. It would have come to you, but I feared your wrath. This is written by your most unworthy slave, Tsai."

"Do you believe that?" uttered the prince, after he had read the missive through the second time.

"It may be true," returned Li. "I think it is true. The beverage she drank may have made her crazy."

"Very likely," said Kong-i; and then, while a look of relief passed upon his features, he added: "I am glad this is so, for now her blood



rests not on my hands. She took her own life. By the Imperial God, the thing shall be made public. Poor woman! She is gone, and I am left without a wife!"

Li smiled as he heard these words, but the prince was sober. Kong-ti did not speak as with the meaning of a joke, but with the thought of the hypocrite. He was rehearsing the part he was to play before the world.

"You may go," he said to Li, "and tell the sad news to my people. Give orders to the mandarins that all amusements in the city be stopped, and have the temples opened to the mourners. It is a sad blow, Li—a sad blow. She was a good woman—too good to live. Go, and leave me alone in my sorrow. Tell the servants that no one shall see me to-day, for I will not be disturbed in my grief."

The attendant withdrew, and as soon as the prince was left alone he started up from his seat and clasped his hands upon his head.

"Not all lost yet!" he exclaimed, while an exulting look broke over his features. "By the Child of the Sun, this thing works well. Now to Yu-li—and then for the finishing of that bold youth who would have snatched her from me!"

Yu-li sat within a sumptuously furnished apartment, and near his door stood his former keeper, Lan. The maiden was pale and wan, and the livid hue about her eyes told how long and freely she had wept. Her fair features were all wrought in agony, and her brow was pencilled with the pain that worked in the brain. She sat there with her head resting upon her hands when she was startled by the entrance of the prince. She shuddered when she saw him, and a groan of despair broke from her lips. Kong-ti motioned for Lan to leave the room, and then he sat down by the maiden's side.

"Bright sunlight of my life," he said, in a low, melancholy tone, "the blow has come, and where shall I look for joy or hope, but in you? Niao is dead!"

Yu-li covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

"Read this," continued the prince, handing her the silken missive which Li had brought.

The maiden took it, and with trembling hands she held it. She read it, and still she shuddered. She thought it possible that the ill-fated princess had taken her own life, but she felt sure, also, that the husband's cruelty had driven her to the act.

"Dear Yu-li," resumed the prince, after he had received back the letter, "this blow has not come upon me so hard as it would had I not been prepared for this. Niao had long been subject to these fits, and I expected she would have died long ago, but some mysterious power has held her up. I think it was the direct will of Heaven that she should live until you were prepared to take her place. You will soon be called upon now to assume the station for which I have had you fitted."

"Let me follow Niao!" groaned the maiden, "and I will bless you."

"So you shall, sweet Yu-li. You shall commence to follow where she commenced a score of years ago."

"No, no. Be kind, and let me die now!"

"Not until you are my wife."

"That I can never be."

"That you shall be!"

"O, be merciful!"

"Let me not suffer such a curse."

"Beware that you do not suffer a greater!"

Yu-li started, for these last words were spoken strangely and fearfully.

"You should know me by this time," the prince added, with a meaning shake of the head.

"You are mine—all mine—and I will make you my wife if you will. If you like not that, then be what other women are, who live as mothers, but not as wives."

The maiden shrank back and burst into tears. They were hot, scalding tears, for they came from a heart that was burning with indignation; but she dared not show all her feelings. She had been so long subject to the power of the prince that the bond seemed almost by nature her portion, and she feared to awaken the wrath of one who seemed to be in the right.

She awoke from all this the terrible threat last made had sunk for her soul more deeply than all else. She shrank from such a fate as shrank a child from the blood-stained hand of the midnight murderer. She was bound hand and foot, and even her speech she dared not use. She would have asked concerning Paul Arden, but she dared not do it. Once she had mentioned his name, and the fearful storm of passion which it called up had frightened her from repeating it.

"Yu-li," spoke the prince, after a few moments of reflection, "I hope we may have no more conversation of this kind. I forgive you for attempting to escape from me, and freely take you back to my love. Beware that you do not lose it. Now when my season of mourning is passed, I shall give you a splendid dowry, so well qualified to fill, and for which I have expended so much to have you fitted. I am sorry that poor Niao is dead, but it was not in my power to prevent it. It was the will of the great Tien-tan, and his will must be done. I bow to the decree, and I hope I am resigned."

[CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.]

#### A WHOLE NATION OF FRANKLINS.

We have a few great engineers, and mechanics, and a large body of clever workmen; but the Americans seem likely to become a whole nation of such people. Already their rivers swarm with steamboats; their valleys are becoming crowded with factories; their towns surpassing those of every State of Europe, except Belgium, Holland and England, are the abodes of all the skill which now distinguishes a town population; and there is scarcely an art in Europe not carried to the same degree of greater skill than in Europe, though it has been cultivated and improved through ages. A whole nation of Franks, Stevensons, and Watts in prospect, something wonderful for other nations to contemplate. In contrast with the comparative ignorance of a bulk of the people of Europe, the great intelligence of the whole people of America is worthy of public notice.

London Sun.

[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

#### LILLIE FANE.

BY GEORGE ALFORD.

Sweet little Fane,  
The little angel,  
Shall never more;  
With face so full of angel light,  
With hair so full of sunshine bright,  
With eyes so full of gleam.

A singing joy,  
Which did employ  
Your thoughts in fondlest prayer;

That never angel of earthly pain  
Should a moment martyr obtain  
O'er such a spirit fair.

With what a pride  
The new-made bride  
Would ever look on thee;

Forseeing in a future hour  
That Heaven would send her such a flower  
Of angel purity.

[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

#### PRIDE AND LOVE:

—OR—

#### THE FREAKS OF FORTUNE.

BY GILBERT LE FEVRE.

It was about the middle of a fine summer's afternoon in the year 1850, that our scene opens on the banks of the Hudson river. Then but little more than an undeveloped and unclaimed wilderness, the land between the Highlands and the upper extreme of Dutchess county was almost uninhabited, save by a few clusters of cottages here and there near the river's margin. The immediate neighborhood of Newburg was the precise locality which we desire to indicate, and which at the present day exhibits a high state of cultivation, and the locality of a thickly settled and prosperous district.

At the moment to which we refer, a single horseman, who had been skirting the river's banks, apparently for miles, in a ride of pleasure, had drawn up his horse, and now, half turning in the saddle, was gazing intently at some object which he described within the shade of an upland grove some hundred or two rods in shore.

"By this light, but it looks more like a picture than an life," burst from the lips of the youthful rider, as he gazed, and turning his horse's head up the gently rising slope, he rode at an easy gait to the spot where he had been gazing, but soon alighting, he tossed the reins of his bridle over the charred remains of a decayed tree, and walked forward.

Beneath the graceful shade of a cluster of noble trees, there was reclining upon the soft green sward a child, perhaps almost too far advanced to merit that appellation, and yet she could have been scarcely more than thirteen years of age. In appearance, she struck you at once as being rather matured for her years, and in form and feature delicate and lovely in the extreme. Her light auburn hair was entirely unconfined, and hung with bewitching grace and luxuriance about her well developed neck and shoulders. Her countenance was frank and open in expression, with a trusting look beaming from her eyes. These were blue—blue as to make you sure of their color at once, and shaded by lashes fawn like in length and beauty. The unmistakable glow of health was on her face, and her clear, clear complexion bespoke the purity of her blood.

No wonder the youthful horseman had been irresistibly drawn toward the girl as she thus sat all unconsciously poring over the pages of a book. No wonder that he paused now, and almost held his breath lest he should break the spell that seemed to hang about the lovely scene before him. But see, the breaking of a dry twig beneath his foot has startled her, and she half rises as he draws near, and is now starting and looking with mingled surprise and interest to see a stranger so near her. The retirement of the grove was not often thus broken in upon, and though the child was not startled exactly, or rather not affrighted, yet she was somewhat surprised.

"You have chosen a very sweet and pleasant spot for your reading," said the stranger, in a low, musical voice, that inspired the child with instant confidence.

"I often come here, it is so near the cottage, and in sight of the river, and always so shady and cool."

"Your home is hard by, then?"

"You can see the cottage through this avenue."

"I do see it, and a lovely location it is."

Seating himself near the spot where the child had been first discovered, the new comer begged that he might not interrupt her, and both were soon seated there together, as though they were old friends. The youth was some eighteen years of age, manly, handsome, and of a bearing and speech that at once produced confidence and trust, while it showed him to be of good birth and refined associations. An hour passed by before either was aware of the progress of time, and that both had been interested and pleased by this chance meeting, was most evident. They had even exchanged names, so to speak. The youth introducing himself as Edward Norcross, who lived some dozen miles towards Poughkeepsie, and the child as Maud Doncaster, whose guardian lived hard by in the cottage they saw.

On his return home, Edward Norcross thought the whole way of the fairy-like beauty of his new acquaintance; her intelligence, grace and beauty had charmed him. He did not tell of his adventure when he reached home, but he dreamed of it, and determined soon again to see one who had delighted and won upon him at a first meeting. Maud heard him, too, more than pleased—she was interested in the handsome young stranger who was so pleasant and agreeable every way, who seemed to know so much of the world, and who had read so many books that she had read, and who admired just the characters that she admired; indeed—childlike innocent—she wished she might meet the young

horseman every day in the "star grove," as it was called.

Edward Norcross was the only son of a wealthy gentleman, whose residence was also on the banks of the Hudson, but some dozen miles or so further north than the present site of Newburg. With the exception of a sister he was an only child, and in the light of his father's views he was an only child, as to him he looked for the sustaining of his name, his fortune and his homestead. The mother had long since passed away, and Edward's father, having lost his natural companion, had espoused a love of books and study to which he was passionately devoted, and had been able to personally superintend his education to the period of his entering college, for he had just graduated at Harvard, and had come home to settle in law, or at least to make up his mind as to what profession or course of occupation he would choose. His father was a stern, proud man—proud of his position and proud, proud of his acquisitions and proud of his children, for Edward's sister was a very sweet, intelligent and lovely girl.

Edward Norcross soon found excuse to visit the spot where he had met the gentle and lovely Maud Doncaster, not once, nor twice, but many times, and ere the long summer days had passed away he was almost a daily visitor at her cottage home, and they strolled and read and much together. All this was apparently unobserved, and they were left quite alone to consult their own wishes and tastes; we say this was apparently the case, and yet, had an observer watched the secret affairs, he would have noticed that there was some pair of eyes that were rarely off the youthful friends when they were thus together, their owner being no less a personage than Granville Osgood, the guardian of Maud.

Mr. Granville Osgood was a man of peculiar appearance; possessed of a commanding form, a fine figure, but a countenance, whatever it might once have been, now quite disfigured and homely by the ravages of the small pox. There was something quite indescribable about him—something that puzzled you the more that you strove to unravel it. That he was a man of intelligence and large cultivation was very evident, but his honest country neighbors, while they bore testimony to his honesty and strict uprightness, and even liberality, yet whispered to each other that Mr. Osgood had met with some disappointment in life, but of what nature they were not able to divine. It was understood, however, that he was the guardian of Maud Doncaster, whose father, a rich widower, now in the East Indies, had entrusted her to his care, as a friend whom he did not fear to trust. That Maud regarded him with the most profound respect and affection, was as evident and apparent as the fact that none but the most judicious and sensible could not be able to divine. It was understood, however, that he was the guardian of Maud Doncaster, whose father, a rich widower, now in the East Indies, had entrusted her to his care, as a friend whom he did not fear to trust. That Maud regarded him with the most profound respect and affection, was as evident and apparent as the fact that none but the most judicious and sensible could not be able to divine. It was understood, however, that he was the guardian of Maud Doncaster, whose father, a rich widower, now in the East Indies, had entrusted her to his care, as a friend whom he did not fear to trust. That Maud regarded him with the most profound respect and affection, was as evident and apparent as the fact that none but the most judicious and sensible could not be able to divine. 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Mr. Osgood, and told her how dear and kind he had been to her, so that Clara felt as though she could kiss him though his countenance was anything but handsome, being, as we have said, disfigured by the ravages of the small pox. But somehow, Clara felt that he was so intelligent, so noble in spirit, that she forgot all about the disfigurement, and indeed conversed so disengagedly and so cheerfully with him, that he, who would have been a laughing stock to the world, was the subject of conversation and admiration on the part of the young people who were present.

The anger of Edward's father knew no bounds—he could not believe that his son would sacrifice such immense pecuniary advantage to the love of a simple country girl. He very deliberately drew him a check for a thousand dollars, sent for him, presented it to him, and desired him at once to retire from the parental roof which had sheltered him from infancy. This was plain punishment to Edward, but he obeyed, and Maud and himself, after a pleasant trip to Saratoga, joined Mr. Osgood once more at his cottage, and then Edward, abandoning his humble means, at once set about the application of his profession. What most surprised him was the calmness with which Mr. Osgood took his father's resentment, since he knew that he felt so deeply interested in Maud's comfort and happiness, but he established his law office in the neighboring village, and at once assumed a share of practice at the county court, which, with the money left from the check his father presented him, was quite sufficient to render them comfortable for a period at least.

One evening, as Edward, his young wife and Mr. Osgood sat quietly outside the cottage door, enjoying the soft freshness of the evening air and pleasantly chatting to each other, Maud's little guardian assumed by some subject of which he desired to speak, and at last said:

"Maud, you have got rid of your old guardian now, and are only responsible to this gay young sprig of the law; glad enough to be relieved from the reign of my rule!"

"No indeed, sir," said Maud, extending her hand to him, "my obligations to you, Mr. Osgood, are too many and too tangible ever to be forgotten. Why, pray, do you speak thus?"

"Because I was thinking if you so easily forget your father in this new relation, there is little chance for your old guardian to be remembered."

"Forget my father?"

"Yes, Maud, forget him—you have not mentioned his name since you were married!"

"True," said she thoughtfully, and turning to herself. "But what does my guardian, is he to me that you are not? You have reared me from a time I know not of, you have been a father could have been to me, and I fear if we were to come home now, I could not love him with the filial regard that constantly actuates my heart for you."

"Maud!" said the guardian, with a trembling lip.

"Well, sir," answered the lovely wife, rising and approaching him as she marked his emotion. "You are my child! I am your father!"

But a moment elapsed in which conviction poured into her heart, and she threw her arms around his neck and wept like a child. Edward, all amazed, could only gaze at the singular scene in silence. He understood that she was not, but could hardly realize its import, though he felt that there could be no mistake here, and that father and daughter were indeed mingling as sweet tears together. Instantly that thought flashed across his mind, explaining certain matters which had often struck him as heretofore peculiar, to say the least of them, as connected with her guardian's incessant anxiety and watchfulness over Maud.

"This is a singular denouement," at last Edward found voice to say.

"Doubtless to you both it is strange enough, and will require explanation."

"Dear, dear father," continued Maud, still hanging about his neck, "how intuitively I have seemed to be drawn towards you, not knowing that one drop of your blood was in my veins!"

"The night is passed and it is now morning," said her father. "The ordeal which I had resolved upon, both for you, my child, and him who should be considered worthy, by me, to be your husband, is over. I have no longer any secrets from you, you have both come forth from the refiner's fire only the brighter and better for the test."

Amazed at this new discovery the young couple were prepared for any development, and only listened when he bade them draw nearer to him and attend to a history new to them both.

"In me no longer see an humble, disappointed scholar named Granville Osgood, but this child's father, Lord Robert Doncaster, of Doncaster Castle, England!"

"You amaze me, sir," said Edward; "what could possibly have induced this disclosure?"

"Listen to my story, Edward Norcross, and you will see that the struggle in my bosom between love and pride has led to the present state of things, and happy is the result after all. When I married your mother, Maud, she was about your age, and very like you; her family was rich, like my own titled and honorable, and until you were three years old, to happen home or domestic trouble existed in all England. Suddenly a cloud came over our household in the visitation of a fearful sickness upon myself, the effects of which I bear so plainly still. I was seized with the small pox, and though fearfully ill had yet sufficient strength of purpose and resolve to order my removal to a safe distance from home in the care of able nurses, lest I might impart the disease to those more precious to me than life itself, my wife and child. At length I recovered, but from being one who might pride himself on his personal appearance, I had become repulsive in looks, a fact which so affected my spirits as to sour my disposition and embitter my very life. I became exceedingly sensitive, thought that my wife doted me now, and indeed I fear that the great alteration in me did change a regard which, perhaps, was never very strong, into, at

least, a cold and formal affection. This harrowed my feelings most sorely. I believed that no one liked me or could like me, and the thought was most horrible to me that my infant, just growing into childhood, would partake of this feeling. I loved my little Maud passionately, and could not bear this thought. No, I thought, she would at least love me, but it would be because I was her father, and even here I was to be disappointed, and not loved for myself, for I was not handsome!"

"At length a sudden illness carried my wife to her grave. I became more sensitive than ever. Philosophy would not come to my aid. I could not bring myself to assume my old position in society. The constant thought harrowed me that my child would love me perhaps as a duty, because I was her father; but O, I would repeat almost in my sleep, would that I might be loved for myself and the warm heart that still beats beneath the scarred surface! Brooding upon these matters, I became little better than a monomaniac in relation to them, until at last I made up my mind to pursue a course which my desires pointed out to me."

"I resolved to come over to America, where I was unknown and safe to remain so. I arranged my business affairs, left faithful agents behind me, came hither and assumed the name I have so long borne, and the relation of guardian to Maud. Having no longer the claim of a parent upon her, I knew if she loved me it must be for myself alone, and to see her affectionate regard, so daily evinced in the progress from childhood to womanhood, has been a solace and happiness to me that has long since cured me of my foolish pride and fear. But having once assumed this position, and observing my growing intimacy together, I watched over it with constant care, leaving you both free to act your own will and pleasure. I knew exactly how the matter would be regarded by your father, Edward Norcross, but I wanted a husband who should love Maud for herself as I have wanted to be loved by her, not to have her marry a fashionable fortune hunter."

"You have sacrificed a fortune to wed her, that is to say, you have apparently done so, but you have gained one by her, sir, that would purchase your father's twenty times over, for the Doncaster estates are valued at millions! and you, children, are at this moment the only living heirs! It is only now remains for us to quietly retire thither and occupy the station which rightfully belongs to us, and this we will do as soon as we may be."

It is almost superfluous to add a sequel to our over true tale, or to give in minutiae the ready reconciliation between Edward and his father, or to depict a closing scene in which we should represent them happily situated in Doncaster, with a princely home and possessed of just as happy hearts and tender affections as characterized their lot when they occupied an humble cottage home on the banks of the river Hudson.

[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

## The Prima Donna of San Carlo.

BY R. C. HANSCOMB.

"At! my lord, you should have been at San Carlo," said Arthur Trelawney, a young Englishman, as he drew a chair beside his friend, Lord Wildair, who sat near the balcony of his apartment, gazing listlessly through the trailing vine-leaves out upon the lovely bay of Naples, now sparkling clear at hand beneath the silvery rays of the high-noon moon, mellowing in the dim distance into a dusky yet golden colored haze, that wedded sky and water on the fair horizon. "You should have been at the San Carlo to-night," he repeated, emphatically.

"And why to-night, of all others?" asked Wildair, as he removed his Turkish pipe, and permitted the smoke to curl out slowly through his thick moustache, once raven black and glossy, now grizzled and "unkempt."

"Why, my dear lord, it was an event—a night to be marked with a white stone on one's calendar."

"Eh?" said Wildair, in a tone of irony. "A new opera, or a new ballet-dancer?"

"Neither, but a new singer—an angel."

"All women are angels by lamplight. Pshaw!" replied Wildair. "Do you remember that dirty old shrew we saw buying roses of the pretty flower girl on the piazza this morning? Very well, that was La Favorita—the queen of the ballet, whom all your young fellows are half mad about."

"I could not be mistaken about the beauty of Signorina Helena," replied Trelawney, "for I sat in the stables and scanned her features through an opera-glass that might serve for a telescope. She is very beautiful. But the mere physical beauty is nothing—her smile has a candor and innocence that would disarm the most inveterate prejudice."

"A heritage of these Italian girls," replied the nobleman.

"Still let Anselmo, skilled in every art To offend Anselmo, yet corrupt the heart," etc.

Believe an old campaigner—they are all false—false as the stars in their cheeks. Yet with their soft, Asianian smiles, they conjure the gold out of British pockets, as schoolboys knock gudgeons from a mill stream. Fought! I am sick of them and their arts."

"But hear me out," said Trelawney, impetuously. "Let her smiles and beauty pass—I would speak of her voice; it is transcendent; of her expression, it is that of an improvisatrice."

"My dear lord," said Wildair, "I doubt your judgment and reject your testimony. You saw a very pretty girl before you—and you took it for granted she sang like an angel because she looked like one. I should not so readily have been carried away—remember, I have heard Malibran and Sontag."

"Ah, my lord, you must go and hear her."

"To what?" said Wildair. "To 'Sang like a siren' she would not charm my ear."

"Maud delights not me nor woman either."

"Ah, you are made of marble, my lord, and not of flesh and blood."

"I enjoy such a reputation among those Italians, I suppose," replied Wildair, carelessly, "because I do not gesticulate like a polichinello."

"They do say you are very cold," replied Trelawney. "And the women are rather afraid of you."

"What would they say if they knew I was craving for excitement?" said Wildair.

"What if they knew I seriously thought of buying a felucca, manning it with desperate fellows, and hoisting the black flag in the Greek Archipelago?"

"It is very evident that you were never under the influence of the softer emotions—that you never loved, my lord," said Trelawney.

"I don't look like a lover—do I?" asked Wildair, with a bitter laugh. "With my hair prematurely gray, with these lines chiselled in my face, it does seem that I could ever

—sport with Anselmo in the shade, Or with the temple's Naiads."

"No, indeed," replied Trelawney, with a frank laugh, "and I suspect my lord, your looks belie you not. Yet, pardon me, if I must confess that there is a mystery about you, that only yourself can solve. I do not profess the key to be, caused, educated in France, and since for years a traveller in the East, I am but little conversant with the personal history of many of my eminent countrymen. This only I know, that you are a political life and a man of the highest in parliament, then suddenly resign your seat; that you were very successful as an author, then suddenly ceased to write; that you were very popular at home, and suddenly expatriated yourself. I found you at Naples—circumstances with which you are well acquainted showed me that beneath a proud, cold exterior, you concealed some sympathies with your fellow-men; that, instead of being the misanthrope you profess yourself, you delighted in deeds of charity."

"Cease, cease!" cried Wildair. "Do not impute to me virtues that I do not possess. I am disgusted with the world and its inmates. If I give the rascals gold, it is only because I know that it will help them quicker to perdition. And for my dwelling-places, all countries are alike to me—only England more hateful than any other. To escape it I trusted myself to the ocean."

'Nor rocked what land it bore me to, Nor sought its climate.'

"Strange!" exclaimed Trelawney.

"Any passing stranger, is it not?" said Lord Wildair.

"Are you sleep?"

"Not at all. These golden summer nights are not for sleep, methinks."

"Then gaze out at that beautiful nature that you love, and I endure, while I make you my confessor, and tell you what you know not, yet seem desirous of learning, a portion of my history. Gray, worn and haggard as you see me, Arthur, I am yet but a little older of forty. Like you, I inherited a large fortune, was well educated, had refined and cultivated tastes, and, like you, looked forward to a high career of glory and of pleasure. In youth we are all castle-builders, needing no firmer basis for our airy structures than a passing cloud gilded by a sunbeam."

"When I went forth into the world—that fairy place of wonders to the noophyte, I was a gentle, timid, retiring boy; ambitious as Lucifer, gentle of the morning, Arthur, but cramped and held back by my accursed sensitiveness. I met—I need not tell you where—an angel of beauty, on whose forehead shone the signet of intellect, bright as the star of dawn. Her eyes were capable of melting tenderness, but they opened like a large furnace, and her mind. She was poor—an orphan. I conceived the romantic notion of wooing her inconspicuously. I wished to be sure that this peerless creature loved me for myself, and not for my title and my rent-roll. The ruse was successful. I took her on a bridal tour, in a humble vehicle, but the first night we lodged beneath the vaulted roof of Wildair Hall, and she knew that she had wedded a noble of the land."

"To do her justice, the sudden change of fortune did not turn her brain—it was too cool and well balanced for that. She bore her honours like one born to them. She seemed in the first part of our union, to be wholly absorbed in a true woman's love. Amid all the splendors that surrounded her, she saw only myself. I must own to you that I was the first to weary of this transient Arcadian existence. Restless desires took possession of me. Field sports did not satisfy the craving—books did not supply the vacuum. I was called upon to take my hereditary seat in the Lords. The spark of ambition was awakened."

"Amazement upon me admirably as I recollect the parliamentary triumphs of my ancestors, all of whom were distinguished for their eloquence no less than for gallantry in the field. I told her what I would do and say when I was among my peers. She caught inspiration from my tone, and a desire to see me shine that she might reflect my splendor sprang up in her bosom. With her for an admiring auditor, I practised extempore speaking, and was gratified to meet with the applause, evidently sincere, that flowed spontaneously from her lips. With her warm kiss lingering on my lips, I presented my delicate fingers imprinted on my neck, I went up to London. I took my seat among the peers."

"Almost directly on my admission, there came up a question which I had studied, and on which I felt bound in honor to speak. I rose to do so. I have told you that I was by nature, and by education, not had my training been such as in any degree to overcome my native diffidence. When I saw all eyes fixed upon my countenance—when I stood in the full glare of those countless lights—a feeling of horror and fright came over me which no language can depict. Fancy the feelings of a somnambulist, who, suddenly awaking, finds himself in the middle of the night, standing on the main truck of a rushing freight train, a leech to which in wakefulness his nerves would never have per-

mitted him to climb, and you will have some faint idea of the agony I experienced. My throat was parched—my brain reeled—my tongue refused its office. Yet I strove to speak—I stammered—I gasped—my articulation was indistinct—I stumbled through a few sentences and then sat down amid silence. The countenance of contemptuous pity. I know not how I crawled out of the house. The fresh air, however, revived me."

"I was to have been the messenger of my triumph to Wildair Hall. I was now to be the bearer of my shameful failure. No matter—there alone I was sure of a warm welcome—words of love and consolation. My groom brought my horse, and I myself in the saddle and galloped forth to London. I rode with a red spur thirty miles without drawing rein. I threw myself from my saddle at the hall door and flew to Lady Wildair's boudoir. In broken words I told the story of my shame. As I ended I saw the same smile of contempt which I had borne in my memory from London, depicted on her countenance. But this was not all. Her disappointment found vent in angry words. She railed me for my failure in speaking language, and ended by calling me a coward and poltroon! It was too much for me to bear. Springing forward, I raised my riding-whip. Curse me not, Trelawney—it did not descend upon those alabaster shoulders whither madness alone directed the blow. No, strong to madness as I was, I yet retained a particle of self-control. The whip dropped from my nerveless hand. But the intention was enough. Those white shoulders shrunk as if they already felt the lash. Her very lips grew pale, but ineffable scorn flashed from her night-like eyes. Drawing herself up to her full, queenly height, and bending on me a look that might have killed, but did not, she swept by me, and I was alone. An hour passed. I sought my couch. Lady Wildair shared it not that night, nor ever again."

"In the morning, I sought her, but she was gone. Her boudoir was its usual aspect. All my wedding gifts lay there untouched. I sought her dressing-room. There hung the sumptuous apparel in which she looked a queen, but I missed the simple, rustic dress in which she first met my eye, and with which she started on her bridal tour. Little dreaming of the splendour that awaited her, I have never seen her since. I caused her to be sought everywhere. I inserted guarded advertisements in the newspapers, inviting her return. They elicited no reply. Whether she is yet living, or has sought oblivion in death, remains to this hour an awful mystery. It was given out that she had committed suicide. A base-minded though nobly-born villain dared to connect his house and her name, and I shot him like a dog. The lesson required no repetition."

"I returned to London and to parliament. My return was signalized by an attempt to pass the bill still under discussion, which I had risen on that fatal night to oppose—and a member sneeringly alluded to me as the eloquent opponent of the measure. I sprang to my feet and replied to his speech in one of an hour and a half—wonderful fulmination, in the centre of which I found the inspiration I had vainly sought before. My success was unbounded."

"Before my arrival, the ministry had every reason to anticipate the passage of their favorite measure. I rallied the opposition, and won over the wavering. The ministry were defeated—they resigned, and I was obliged to seat in the new cabinet. But I had no heart for public life."

"I returned to the solitude of my ancestral hall. In utter friendlessness I poured out my full heart in poetry, which, in a spirit of reckless indifference I gave to the world. The public caught it eagerly, and I became famous. But the popular plaudits were but a cold air. I went abroad. In Paris, for two or three seasons I plunged into a career of fratricidal dissipation. They yet talk at Frescati of the moody Englishman, who staked thousands on the turn of a die, and yet came off victorious ever, cold and impassable amid the wondrous congratulations of the astonished *habitués*."

"I have gone from city to city like the accursed Hebrew of the legend—have courted death, and found it not, and find myself here; a lonely man, bereft at least of a secret hope scarce avowed to myself, that has yet clung to me through all my wanderings, that I might yet find the lost one. But now a spirit's whisper seems whispering—nevermore! and I feel indeed that nevermore upon this shore of time will two hearts, so rudely rent asunder by the wave of passion, meet again."

"My tale is ended, Arthur; is it not a blithe one to tell of a moonlight night, beside the bay of Naples, in this soft climate of love and music? Good-night. Go to your bed now, and dream if you can of the young prima donna of San Carlo."

Trelawney was so much affected by the narrative, that he could find no words to express his sympathy; he could only offer his hand, and warmly grasp that of Lord Wildair, as he falteringly bade him adieu for the night.

"Time wore on—again and again Trelawney listened to the song of the siren, and it soon became evident that he was completely enthralled by the potency of her spell. He sought an introduction to her; he found her accomplished and amiable, and, instead of the cold, he announced to Lord Wildair, his intention of offering her his heart and fortune."

"I must see her, then," said Wildair, with a sigh. "I must abandon my hermit ways in which I have found a sort of vegetative calm, if not content, for one night at least, and judge this *rara avis* for myself. A bitter experience has given me a fatal skill in physiognomy. Promise me that you will not make this girl a proposal, till I have seen her."

"That I will do readily, my lord," replied Trelawney. "It imposes no restraint upon me, since I shall not call on her again till to-morrow, and you can see her at the opera, to-night."

"Well, to-night, then, if it must be so," said Wildair.

"You will be singularly favored by an unusual display of her accomplishments, for she is to

introduce an English song," answered Trelawney.

"I am sorry for it," answered Wildair, dryly. "I hate to hear my mother tongue murdered by these mouthing foreigners."

"She is said to speak like a native."

"So was the courier reported to speak—the fellow I hired to carry my baggage—but I could not understand a word he said, except one national oath—and even that he mispronounced."

Night came, however, and Wildair, accompanied by Trelawney, found himself in the latter's box at San Carlo. The opera was "Otello," Wildair was indifferent to the opening scenes, but the moment the young prima donna appeared, his eyes were riveted upon her, as (he too, were suddenly enthralled by the magic spell that had enchanted all Naples. Emotions to which he had for a long time been callous, reawakened their empire over his heart. Perhaps there was something in the portraiture of that

"Jealousy, that dotes, but doubts, And murders, yet adores."

which forcibly and poignantly brought up the vanished image of his own love, so cruelly lost to him by the influence of a passion, more momentary, yet quite as fatal in its results. His kindled fancy even beheld in the Desdemona of the evening features akin to those of the lost one. But when she sang the first verse of her English song:

"I have a secret sorrow here—  
A grief I'll never impart;  
It burns me deep, it burns me sore,  
But it consumes my heart."

he murmured—"It was her song—it is her voice—it is herself"—and fell back fainting in the arms of Trelawney.

The latter instantly drew the curtains of the box to screen the incident from the eyes of the audience, and hastened in search of remedies. When he returned, he found the prima donna's mother in the box, bathing the forehead of the unfortunate nobleman, while tears were streaming copiously from her eyes. She begged Trelawney, in a few hurried words, to go for her daughter, the curtain having just fallen.

In a few minutes, Wildair opened his eyes. "It is a dream," he said feebly. "Somebody mocked me with a vision of the past." Then, gazing fixingly on the strange lady, as she sat in the dim light, he said: "I must be very ill—I am the victim of singular illusions to-night. Where is my friend?"

"He will return directly," replied the lady, in a tremulous voice, in the English tongue.

"That voice again!" cried Wildair, springing up. "Speak! in God's name, tell me who are you?"

"Herbert, have you forgotten me?" was the reply.

"Amazement!" cried Wildair. "I shall go mad. But—" he extended his quivering hands—"am I forgiven?"

"Am I forgiven?" replied Lady Wildair, in a voice of anguish.

She was felled in her husband's arms. The door of the box opened. A younger Amanda, now, divested of her stage attire, the image of her mother in her youthful days, stood before the strangely re-united pair.

"And who—who is this, Amanda?" cried Wildair. "Did you, when you fled from my brutality, marry again?"

"No, Herbert," replied Lady Wildair. "This is your own daughter. May she be a bond of union between us!"

There are some scenes which it is also impossible for pen and pencil to depict. This meeting of father and daughter was one of them. The party returned to Wildair's hotel. There it was that he learned how, impelled by pride, resentment and blighted affection, Lady Wildair, fled from her husband's house—and from England; how her reason gave way beneath the pressure of suffering, how her child saw the light in a foreign land, what feelings and what reasonings deferred her return, until such time as she learned that Wildair had plunged into a career of dissipation, exaggerated by evil tongues, which scrupled not to charge him with the formation of new ties. The scene at Wildair Hall had induced her to believe that she had formed a false estimate of her character, and coupled, with subsequent intelligence, deterred her from rejoining him with her child. The story was an illustration of the fatal effects that often follow one false step. Supporting herself by the exercise of her musical talent, she had contrived to live (under an assumed name), and to educate her daughter, until the latter, recognized as a singer of the highest talent, found herself in the path of fame and fortune.

But the past was forgotten in the rushing tide of the present joy. Trelawney was united to the young prima donna, and the Christmas of that year found them all beneath the stately roof of Wildair Hall, the happiest family in "Merrie England."

## SELF-CONTROL.

It seems to me that all times are alike adapted for happiness, and that the growth and improvement should grow old, the last days of life must be happiest of all. Each stage of life is but the preparation for the next one. It is the transient, and the pleasures that are to make the future time happy. The child has indeed but few troubles, but they are as great to him as larger ones prove to his parent. I asked a friend once, speaking of the happy, cloudless days of childhood, if he would like to be always a child? He stopped for a moment, and then said no. I think he was right. There is progress in everything—in our means of happiness and in our capacity for enjoyment. Then let us not look back upon the time-wrinkled face of the past only with feelings of regret. Give me the present, glowing and full of life, and the future glows with life in its train. I would rather look forward than back; rather seek the golden hours in working out present happiness than in vain regrets for the past. It is but the helm with which to steer our outward course. The future lies before us. It is the step and rugged mountain up which lies our way. It is not genius or fortune that paves the way to eminence, but earnestness, self-control, wisdom. These are in our hands; let us use them, and when at the close of life we turn to look back on our path, and see it stretching far down before us peacefully, happily, we may lay ourselves down to rest.—*Fluckiger*.





[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

## LIFE WELL SPENT.

BY JOHN KING.

O, be thine the satisfaction  
That thou'lt well spend of thy part;  
Let thy past and present action  
Be at peace with all the heart.

Time with us is not abiding,  
Like streams rushing to the sea;  
It currents is swiftly gliding  
To a vast eternity.

If thou'lt stamp thy name forever  
With great deeds of nobleness,  
Come thy onward struggle, never  
Slave at the approach of death.

Be thy acts a just example  
Of the heart thou hast within;  
Hearts of goodness breed and ample,  
Love and confidence will win.

All good deeds in the distant age,  
Plain written as with a pen,  
Shall stand out upon the pages  
Of the living hearts of men.

And there like some grand old story,  
That doth nerve us while we bear,  
In all thy nobleness and glory  
Shall forever appear.

[Written for The Flag of our Union.]

## MABEL SEFTON:

—OR—

## THE WARD AND GUARDIAN.

BY ADELAIDE HARRIS.

## CHAPTER I.

The morning sun is shining with mellowed radiance through the soft haze of a summer atmosphere, and sends great bars of golden mist down the green glades and velvet slopes of a park in "Merrie England."

Huge trees cluster together making great arches with their graceful boughs which twine about each other in loving fellowship, waving, whispering and caressing, as the south wind breathes its blessing on them.

Beneath one solitary oak around which the grass is so fresh and smooth, it might be the dancing hall of Queen Titania, is gathered a herd of brown deer. They halt suddenly, and with startled look glance their bright eyes toward a distant carriage-road. A sound of voices approaches, and with heads thrown back and ears erect, they not away down one of the many wood-lanes, breaking as they pass a hedge of honeysuckle, which sends up a sigh of fragrant perfume at their rudeness.

"Ah ha, Sir Robert, you affect the rustic withal," exclaimed the younger of a party of three cavaliers, as he threw himself upon a seat at the foot of the great oak.

"Not I, in truth, Master Hubert. What you see of grace or beauty hereabout, which Nature hath not done, ascribe to the ladies Alice and Mabel."

"There is not a little grace and taste displayed here with this cover of sweets twining overhead. If it were not for bees hovering forever about these gay beauties, I think I might fancy them myself."

"The flowers are much obliged to you, I dare say," said Sir Thomas Clifford, their companion, as he seated himself by Hubert's side. "But it is quite as well," he added, laughingly, "that they have somewhat to defend them from your admiration."

"Now I beg you will say nothing I must resent, Clifford; this is such an exquisite place for a day-dream, I would not have it disturbed," answered Hubert, leaning back with an air of affected languor quite ridiculous in connection with the merry blue eyes and animated countenance he possessed.

"I could easily fancy myself one of those, to-be-dreaded sylvan deities, with attendant dryads to anticipate my every wish. Stafford's face yonder, looking so comely dignified, does not help to carry out the fancy, however."

"Nay, that is not so, his countenance has more than once served as a check to your fervid fancy. Is it not so?"

"To check, yes, but not chill it. Sir Robert's good faith I believe to be invincible."

After a moment's silence, he continued:

"Some one must have superintended this bowyer's arrangement, who had an eye for the picturesque; what think you, was it the Lady Alice?"

Clifford, pretending not to notice the significant emphasis and roguish look which accompanied the mention of the Lady Alice, called to Sir Robert, who had walked to a distance.

"Some one sits here methinks, who loves to look at Stafford House; sit there a moment, Sir Robert. Between those trees there is a fine view of the eastern wing."

"Your own particular tarret, too," said Hubert, rising. "Little farther to the right you will get a better view."

Stafford seated himself as required, and looked at the scene carefully at first, then as if a new thought had taken possession of his mind, looked earnestly—he seemed to have forgotten his companions, and aliened to a fit of musing.

"Well," said Hubert, with a long drawn sigh, "I would not have proposed, had I thought it would strike you dumb."

"You were not affected in that manner, certainly," said Clifford, laughing.

Sir Robert started from the seat at their remarks, and cutting down a branch of the overhanging honeysuckle with his riding whip, exclaimed:

"You gentlemen, both may be better acquainted with this part of the grounds than myself. I never come this way."

"This, then, is the ladies' walk?" asked Clifford; "the Lady Alice said you left one particular haunt for them."

"Yes, and I never intrude."

"I doubt much, Stafford, if any lady would consider your presence an intrusion. The disinclination lies with you."

"Perhaps so," he answered coldly, and very soon remembering an engagement, he left them.

"There," said Hubert, looking after him, "goes a most courteous gentleman, with one exception; mention the subject feminine, and you who were in the tropics, immediately face an iceberg. Why is this? Sir Clifford, cannot tell me?"

"Not I, it passes my wisdom."

"One might think some fair dame had played him false, only I would as soon expect Mont Blanc to give any woman the chance."

"There was a time when he avoided the subject laughingly, disclaiming all knowledge—now he avoids it with a kind of bitterness."

"True, I noticed that to-day."

"Heard you last night, Hubert, his answer to the Lady Alice's handmaiden?"

"Yes, that he was too old now to play the gallant," and she added with a merry laugh, "we can find some one, perhaps, as ancient as you."

"I must say he looked excessively grim," answered Clifford. "Yet never was braver man or kinder heart than had and is Sir Robert Stafford."

"Trust me, Clifford, it is something more than a silver hair now and then among his raven locks, which has given this added sternness to his manner. I for one would dare mighty deeds with a head like Stafford's on my shoulders. What say you?"

"The same, good Master Hubert; but what think you, should even now bear away from a certain cavalier a fair dame we meet? See yonder Stafford House, as we approach it in its exceeding beauty, may well lay claim to the best and fairest, having such a master as Sir Robert."

"Faith, Sir Clifford, you have learned croaking well, and by the mass, to fulfil it, he is walking upon the terrace with Mistress Mabel." Sir Robert Stafford had been the guardian of his niece, the Lady Alice, since her seventh birthday, when she was left an orphan—and he had served in the same capacity to the daughter of his old friend and brother-in-law, Walter Sefton, for nearly the same length of time. The Lady Alice is just seventeen, and Mabel Sefton has just passed her eighteenth year. Stafford House sat with their gay and cheerful merriment, and its walls echo laughter still, more silvery sweet, if not as easily heard. The mirth of girlish hearts, even old Time must feel a twinge of regret, as he puts forth his skinny finger to check and chill. Many a trick of wood craft had they learned of old Adam the forester. Mabel, especially, was well skilled in archery, and could draw the bow and wing an arrow with a precision which challenged all competition. Good horsewomen they were both, besides being skilled in all the accomplishments of their day.

Sir Robert had discharged his duty faithfully, and might well be proud of his success. So said lookers-on, but in truth, except as far as giving orders that they should be obeyed in everything, and then leaving home to their content for years at a time, he had very little to do with directing their youthful steps towards womanhood. Without doubt, if the gay Lady Alice had insisted, on some of his few returns to Stafford House, that it was proper for herself and Mabel to secure a band of retainers, don suits of armor, and at their head join King Charles's standard, he would have stopped his usual pacing up and down the terrace, turned his grave, handsome face upon her, and not even looking beyond to see the shy, lily-like Mabel, would have inquired when he should order the equipments. Yet he was always kindness as to the children, and kissed them with a fatherly care on his coming and departure, until his last return, when the two graceful girls, in great haste, presenting their taper fingers instead of blushing cheeks for a carousal, started for a moment, and looking at them with a shade of surprise on his countenance, he asked their age. Seventeen and eighteen—he did not quite remember to which belonged the one or the other, but the fact suggested many thoughts. What was he to do now—surely it was much easier for him to face an advancing host and do duty as a general, than appear at court with his youthful wards. Yet that something more was required of him now than formerly, at first a vague idea, soon became conviction. Revolving this thought in his mind, he left the grand saloon, where, according to the fancy of the merry Alice, they had given him somewhat of a stately reception.

Crossing the entrance hall up the great oaken stair, he went through many a dimly lighted corridor, he sought his own apartments. They were situated in the extreme eastern wing of the house, quite away from the main body, and here alone he felt at home. Sir Robert upon entering, glanced around the lofty rooms, then hovering his side a richly chased short sword, and seated himself in one of the deep windows which overlooked the verdant landscape.

Home with its beauties—home with its memories of bygone years—thoughts gathered from past and present were rushing to his heart for recognition, on this first day of his return, this first hour of solitude—but he thrust aside the secret sorrow of recollection, and resolutely set himself to his duties as guardian of his nieces. Disagreeable, because unnumbered, and unlike his customary habits of taste. It was necessary that these gay creatures and pleasant ladies should no longer be deserted, that youth, beauty and gaiety should have full sway and possession for a time at least. In the few words which the Lady Alice had spoken on his arrival, this idea was sufficiently prominent to prove without difficulty, that he was not a miser. He did not recollect if Mabel agreed with her, but that was not strange, as he could not remember if she had ever made a request of him herself.

His house must be opened to the surrounding gentry, and echo mirth as it had not since years ago, when his elder brother brought there his youthful bride, the mother of the Lady Alice. He had in the days found pleasure in playing the part of a doting father, and now he would now try to enact the father for her daughter, as well as the daughter of his old friend.

He hoped to call about them all the guests that his wards might require, and investing them with all necessary power to preside, withdraw himself from the merry rout at pleasure.

Yonder were the abbey towers, visible through the trees, and his glance upon them, it confirmed a resolution in his mind to seek and consult the lady abess. The girls, without residing for any length of time with the sacred sisterhood, had been, notwithstanding, much under their guidance. The merry Alice making them laugh in spite of themselves behind the elaborate embroideries over which they toiled, and the quiet Mabel winning all their hearts by her gentle goodness.

It was the place Sir Robert should seek above all others to learn somewhat of his proteges, he being quite as ignorant of their characters as the strictest stranger. Accordingly, he left the apartment where he had been sitting, and passing through several other connected with his own, entered the long, dimly-lighted picture gallery.

From its sides looked down upon him innumerable pictured ghosts, who, from their obscure corners, seemed to glower angrily at the usurping generations, who had thrust them thus coolly to the wall—or else gazed out with that weird glance of pictured eyes, turning and turning, seeming in their strange scrutiny to look beyond the body into the very soul. At the further end of the long gallery were two doors, one leading to another suite of rooms, the other opening upon a winding staircase which was a private entrance to the chapel below.

Sir Robert opened the latter of these, and descending the stairs, passed from the chapel into the open air. As the door was thrown back, a breath of the summer wind stole and lifted the great dusty banners hanging so mute in their old age, after a hot youth well fought field, then as if the place were uncanny for so free a spirit, it sighed itself away through the many crannies and crevices in the lozenge shaped pines.

In a lofty room commanding even a more extended prospect than that of Sir Robert, sat Mabel Sefton on a low couch almost oriental in its ease and beauty. This room had been chosen by the ladies for themselves, and remodeled in its adornments to suit their fancy. The heavy oak panelings and antique tapestry would have given it a sombre hue, but the addition of light, graceful drapery at an ornamental window, couches of ruby velvet, flowers placed in the old sconces, music, embroidery and all the pretty nothings of girlish occupation and amusement, made them a necessary background to the picture. By the side of the fair Mabel, her fingers just parting the leaves, lay an old illuminated missal, its heavy bands and clasps of highly polished steel. She sat, perhaps, musing upon its contents, calm and pensive, looking the very genius of a summer day, dreamy and peaceful. A few low notes of music, the last strain of a misere, issued from her parted lips, and lifting the book again, she resumed her reading of its pages. Soon there came another burst of melody, joyous and jubilant, as if a lark had played truant all the day, and were now essaying its matin song, and the Lady Alice bounded into the room.

"Look you yonder, Mistress Mabel," she exclaimed, "where rides our Lord Keeper, speeding us for very life. I doubt not because forsooth he fears us poor damsels."

Mabel looked in the direction where Alice pointed, and saw Sir Robert on a fine black road, riding rapidly towards the abbey.

"Sir Robert rides well," answered Mabel, after they had watched him to a turn in the road.

And why should he not, doing naught else all his life? He had ridden hither to see that his aged birds were safe, and then off again to his own pleasures."

"Alice, Alice, who hath told these naughty vain things," and encircling her waist with one arm, she shook her finger playfully in Alice's glowing face.

Shortly after, a servant entered, and acquainted the ladies that Sir Robert wished to speak with them on his return from the abbey, whether he had gone, and would wait on them there if agreeable.

"This seems to promise something," said Alice, after the servant had left the room. "My sage uncle may awake to a sense of his duties after all. Why do you not look delighted, Mabel? Think what might be if he willed it—dotes and gallops all the year round."

"Can you desire this somewhat—have we not always been very happy?" asked Mabel, looking at Alice.

"O yes, we have, but do not look so serious. You know that was all well enough for children, but for us—why we should be breaking new hearts every day."

"Say you so? Look well to your own, then; if hearts are broken, yours may be among the number."

"Never fear me, Mabel. Must remain whole for many a long day yet."

Hearing Sir Robert approaching, Alice began mocking the look of quiet dignity with which Mabel waited to receive him, but seeing this troubled her, she quickly ceased, and sat watching the door anxiously, as her uncle entered.

Sir Robert advanced towards the young ladies, who rose to meet him. Greeting them kindly, he seated himself near an antique table, and began conversing of the books thereon.

"O, those all belong to Mabel," said Alice, in reply to a question of Stafford. "That a Kemps is hers, and all the rest. My company is so poor she is obliged to call in the primitive book into use, and the deities."

"Sir Robert will not believe that," answered Mabel, with a quiet smile.

A pause ensued, during which Stafford looked at each of the fair girls attentively for several minutes. Sir Robert broke the silence, by saying:

"I propose remaining at home during the summer, young ladies, and if it is your wish we will see as many of our friends and neighbors at

Stafford House, as good Mrs. Bertram can accommodate."

"Dear uncle, you could not have made a happier suggestion. We two poor girls, have been pining in solitude this many a year, and I can assure it is a great pity."

He looked at her with a grave smile, and asked:

"How much earlier than seventeen would my fair niece prefer entering society?"

"O this age does very well for me, but you forget poor Mabel, she is a whole year older than myself."

"Indeed it is she a whole year older?" and turning with a kindly inquiring expression, he asked, "Has Mabel then been so very lonely?"

"No, indeed, Sir Robert," she answered, earnestly. "I do not think I know how to be lonely."

"That is just what I mean," cried Alice.

"She goes about the house quiet and sober as a dove who has lost its mate, not knowing what is the matter, while it is all for the want of amusement, or a sweetheart, to tease now and then. Now confess it, Mabel, is it not so?" and she looked at her in a pretty, beseeching way.

But Mabel turned away and made no reply, for she thought it useless.

Sir Robert listened for an answer, but none came, and although such a foolish remark needed none, yet he could not but wish she had said something.

"Well, my dear girls," he said, rising to go, "I will see in future that you are provided with suitable companions."

"You will soon be rewarded," exclaimed Alice, "by having both of us troublesome damsels off your hands, if my prophecies are worth anything."

Without replying to this sally, Sir Robert bowed and left the room.

"O Alice, how could you talk in such a manner! Sir Robert must think us so ungrateful for all his kindness, when in truth we have been so happy."

"Tut, tut, pretty Mabel, he does not care. Do you not suppose it will be a relief to have us provided with protectors without troubling him?"

Mabel sighed to herself, and began planning to piece the lilacs and violets she had just arranged so carefully.

Sir Robert had consulted the lady abess in regard to his wards, and was about to follow her advice in presenting them to the world.

It had been the wish of Alice's mother, that should her daughter show any inclination for the life of a cloister, it should be encouraged. On inquiring if his niece had shown any intention in a conventual life, that good lady could not but smile at the thought of the gay girl as a member of the sacred sisterhood, and assured him it was most unlikely she would ever seek it of her own free will, as a retired life would probably do her more harm than good.

"Mabel," she added, "my sweet Mabel, I hope one day to see her settled from the changes and vicissitudes of the old world within this quiet sanctuary. Happy those who can turn heavenward without waiting to be driven into the straight and narrow way by the world's hard blows."

All that Stafford saw of Mabel convinced him more fully, that should she pass a few years longer, and her heart remain untouched, it was very probable the abess would be gratified by seeing her a devotee within those walls.

Three or four weeks had passed away and Stafford House was gay enough to suit even Alice. Among the many guests assembled were two of Sir Robert's more intimate friends, Sir Thomas Clifford, and Hubert Falconbridge.

The Lady Mabel was installed mistress of the house and ceremonies. She had insisted and urged the duty upon Alice, as with right belonging to her, but one might as well try to teach a battery mathematicians. Mrs. Bertram the housekeeper fretted at her carelessness, the butler laughed, shook his head, and would go to the Lady Mabel for orders, when Stafford was away.

The beggars at the gate received largess as gratefully from both, but if a tale of distress was to be told, or advice needed, they one and all waited patiently to get the ear of Mabel, sure she would neither forget nor neglect them.

Sir Robert seemed to enjoy the festivities of the place at first, and did much to enhance its pleasures by his generosity and well advised caresses. Oftentimes would he find himself detaining Mabel at his side, watching the play of features in her upturned face, as she pleaded some boon for Alice, or asked his advice to their movements.

Hubert Falconbridge had been much with Mabel of late, greatly occupying her attention it seemed to Sir Robert. As for himself, these guests palled upon his taste, and for a few days he had been more than usually taciturn, absenting himself almost wholly from the animated party beneath his roof. Especially had his manner shown this change on the morning on which our story opens, when he, together with Sir Thomas Clifford and Hubert, discovered the rustic seat beneath the fairies' oak.

## CHAPTER II.

Mabel Sefton stood on the same morning, by one of the long windows in the fine old library, which served as a breakfast room. Each guest had departed to his various pleasures and pastimes, and Mabel was left alone, musing upon the events of the past few weeks. Her brow was a little clouded; she feared in some way she had incurred her guardian's displeasure, as none of her efforts to dispel his gloom seemed as all successful; and at last she began to think the change must be hers, in herself. It was always kind, she could not complain of any real omission or commission—yet how much more convincing is the kindness that is striving to hide a change; this Mabel felt keenly. There had been great satisfaction and assistance in consulting him upon each little plan, and he had given her every opportunity of so doing, until she wondered, he was so kind, why he had never known him so well before.

With a sigh she turned to the thought, whether it were best to consult him upon certain gayereties which were destined to take place within a few days. The birthday of Lady Alice was to come, and such had suggested for the day's amusement, his or her favorite pastime, but Alice had overruled them all, and insisted upon a grand trial of skill in archery, at which all who chose to enter the lists should compete for prizes. The old forester, who took special pride in this accomplishment of the young ladies, as he had taught them himself, was quite transported with delight at the decision, and at having all places and arrangements put into his hands. True, it might all go on as well without the trouble of consulting Sir Robert, but might he not feel it a neglect on her part, changing so much from the usual custom? Yet the idea of seeking him himself became more difficult every day.

Mabel had seen Clifford, Falconbridge and Stafford as they passed down the main avenue and turned off to the right in the direction of her favorite path nearly an hour before, and turning hastily from the window, she resolved to go out upon the terrace and speak to Sir Robert when he should return. Accordingly she left the room, and stepping out upon the massive flagging which ran through the green mound, she walked to and fro once or twice. Soon Stafford was seen returning alone, walking slowly up the avenue, dressed in a rich suit of maroon velvet, with no ornament save a jeweled sword. He did not raise his eyes on approaching, but kept carefully tossing pebbles from the path with his riding whip. Ascending the steps, he would have entered the hall door, had not Mabel come forward timidly, and arrested his footsteps.

"I would speak with Sir Robert, if he will wait on me a few minutes."

"Certainly, my Lady Mabel, I am at your service," and a pleasant smile lighted up Stafford's countenance as he joined her.

"Then you are not among the riders to Alnwick this morning?"

"No, they will set off in half an hour, and I had promised to meet the lady abess early in the day, so I must not remain behind."

"It will be a merry party if my fair niece takes the lead. I saw her fully equipped an hour ago."

"Yes, I almost regret I cannot go, the country is so beautiful between this and Alnwick."

Mabel commenced at once telling Sir Robert why she had detained him—what they proposed doing, and concluded by asking "which part of the grounds he considered best for the archery meeting." She was nervously occupied all the while, turning a pretty ring of turquoises and pearl upon her finger, and with eyes still fixed thereon, she awaited a reply. But Stafford was silent. Thinking he had not understood her inquiry, she commenced repeating it, when glancing upward, she met his eyes fixed upon her so earnestly, that blushing in spite of herself, she hesitated and came to a full stop.

Sir Robert, not appearing to notice her embarrassment, took the little ring and began twirling the ring so industriously kindly within his own, and said:

"So Alice has a birthday this week, has she?"

"Yes, Sir Robert."

"Does not my little Mabel ever have birthdays also?"

Growing a trifle more dignified at that word little, she straightened her graceful figure to see that it came nearly up to his shoulder, and replied:

"O yes, surely, but—"

"But what?"

"I do not think much of my own."

"O you do not,"—stroking his moustache to hide a smile.

"I mean to speak of it. The kind lady superior suggests to me many subjects for thought on those days, and if possible, I pass them in solitude, and you see," she added, with a convincing smile, "as no one else remembers them, it is all very well."

Stafford's face gained an additional shade of seriousness at this answer, and he pressed more closely the little hand still held within his own.

"You are making fine preparations for the birthday of Mistress Alice."

"O, we all remember so well when hers is coming, it would be impossible to conceal it, and besides, she wishes to be so happy on that day."

Seeing Stafford still look grave, and fearing his newly pledged kindness might vanish, she hastened to say:

"I hope, Sir Robert, you will approve my arrangements. Although you had given me carte blanche for all our plans, still I was quite sure I ought to acquaint you of them, and she looked at him inquiringly.

"It was very proper, indeed, it was quite necessary. I approve entirely of everything."

"I thank you very much, Sir Robert," said Mabel, earnestly, and her gentle, grateful heart fluttered like a released bird at being quite sure her guardian was satisfied with her.

The spell being broken now, the happy maiden chatted away upon many a theme, her low silvery laughter chiming in right merrily. Well pleased at her side, stood the graceful, listening cavalier.

Time passed swifter than Mabel noted, and the fact was brought to her mind by the busy voices and footsteps which began to be heard from within, and the clatter of horses as they were led round to the entrance with other notes of preparation for the morning's excursion. Lady Alice's voice was heard exclaiming, "what can have become of Mabel?" and at the same moment she appeared in the doorway, accompanied by a group of beauteous dances, among whom none shone brighter than the lovely Alice.

"How now," she cried, spying Mabel and her uncle, who approached from the end of the terrace. "This augurs not well for poor me. Is a council being held? I get so much advice from you two separately, that I am in constant fear of your uniting forces."

"Yes, this moment Sir Thomas Clifford and Falconbridge were seen hastening up one of the



paths, while at the same time several cavaliers issued, booted and spurred from a side door, and joined the group already upon the terrace.

Lady Alice had seen Sir Thomas approaching, and with that spice of coquetry she possessed in common with all beauties, if not all women, she pretended she was not aware of his presence.

Turning to a gentleman she begged him to fasten the ruby clasp which had fallen from her garter. He was only too happy to be so occupied, and while bending over her small finely shaped hand he could not help prolonging the operation to its utmost extent.

Alice chatted merrily as she listened to hear if Clifford was coming to her side. But he had stopped with Falconbridge, who had bounded up the steps on first seeing Mabel, and was now earnestly engaged talking with her.

Lady Alice drew away her hand almost prettily when the garter was secured, and looked around for Clifford. She caught his eye looking at her, that it only made her the more indignant. She thought he understood her, and so she did, yet loved her none the less for her wicker.

"A fine day, Lady Alice," said Sir Thomas, joining her.

She looked steadily in the opposite direction pretending not to hear.

"A fine breeze, Lady Alice."

With head still turned, she bit her lip and tried not to laugh.

"Good morning, Lady Alice," she said, laughing, in spite of herself, "your gallantry is matchless. Did you not know I could not hear you?"

"As well doubtless, as your ladyship—"

"I think we shall quarrel, Sir Thomas."

"I am wholly at your mercy," he answered, bowing courteously. "But here are the horses and see, they are nearly all mounted, shall we descend?"

Lady Alice was soon well seated and Clifford, vaulting into the saddle, was by her side in an instant, no one presuming to compete with him.

Falconbridge had been urging Mabel eagerly, but all in vain, to change her mind and accompany them to Alwick. He at last begged the favor to ride with her to the abbey.

"No, I could not think to deprive you of the pleasant company you will have in the gallop to the castle," answered Mabel.

"The Lady Mabel can deprive me of pleasure only by refusing my request."

This she spoke in a tone so low and earnest, that Mabel thought to accept the proffer cavalierly as a refusal, were better than to persist in a refusal.

In truth, Sir Hubert, if you are not going with these gay people, and care to accompany me, I do not object, but remember, you will have to wait a weary time at the abbey."

The permission was all Mabel wanted; he would willingly wait the year if there were need, and thanking Mabel, he went delightedly to order the horses. The cavalcade had just set off, and Mabel looked around to speak with Clifford ere he went, but he had disappeared. He had not spoken of going to Alwick, yet she gazed eagerly back after the horsemen, only to see the last one just vanishing at a distant turn in the road. Mabel felt a kind of pleasure and exhilaration at being regaled to her guardian's favor, which she had never felt before, and did not strive to account for—satisfied he was not the place, she tipped a gaily away through the great hall to her room, and soon came forth equipped for the ride. Hubert was already waiting, and in a few minutes they were on their way to the abbey.

Stafford had waited within the embrasure of a deep window, with some little anxiety it must be confessed, to see if Mabel would permit Sir Thomas to accompany her, and on seeing them set off he turned away with a slight curl of his lip at his weakness in caring or fearing, and sought his own room.

It was quite late before the Lady Mabel and Falconbridge returned. Sir Robert looked up from the book he had in hand, as he heard the sound of horse-hoofs upon the gravel. Mabel's face was glowing with exercise—the light curls of her sunny hair fell with pretty grace from beneath a velvet cap, and were waved by the transient wind almost into the face of Hubert, as he bent forward to catch every word she uttered. They halted some minutes, Mabel talking the while very earnestly to Hubert, apparently finishing something which had been the topic of conversation.

"I cannot but agree with you in everything, my lady," were the words devoted to Stafford's ears, as Hubert, with a look of defiance, assisted Mabel to dismount.

Her guardian's face darkened into a frown as he gazed at the scene, and tossing his book aside with an exclamation of vexation, he started from his seat. A distant step was heard approaching—she paused, it was Hubert. The cheerful voice accented a serving man on his way, that light, confident tread among him, and with a varying expression of countenance, as if he distrusted himself, just as his visitor's hand was upon the handle of the door, Sir Robert withdrew into an inner room and turned the heavy bolt. Stafford felt his impatience to be unmanly, yet was too ill at ease to conquer it and meet Falconbridge as usual.

Until morning Sir Robert had hardly unmoored his own feelings in regard to Mabel. That stern, cold man, who had born the shock of conflict unflinchingly, now found shelter beneath his own roof a little wild wood flower which had gone well nigh to unnerve him, he awe to his power.

Stafford ran over in his mind very rapidly the events of the past few weeks, and felt an almost uncontrollable longing to snatch the child, as he felt he to be, from the precinct of any other, and make her his own. But the unusual passion passed away, and calmly he strove to view her interest in his pleasure as the natural result of an affectionate nature. Hubert loved her, probably she reciprocated it, and therefore her destiny was fixed.

On the night preceding Alice's birthday, the guests had all departed to their several rooms, and Mabel, under some pretence, remained behind in the great drawing-room, promising in a short time to join Alice. She was seated on a low stool amid a sheet of moonlight, which had flung itself across the floor, her head bent forward and resting upon the arm of a heavy carved chair.

The last few years had been hurried away amid plans, costumes and arrangements. The only quiet moments which presented themselves were when she could steal away down the green lane to her favorite seat beneath the great oak, and now she wished to think. Some one had found out that the oak was her resort, and each morning of late was placed there a bunch of dewy flowers, with the words, "For Mabel," written upon a slip of paper and placed among them.

She never met any one going thither returning. It was a secluded spot, yet both Falconbridge and Clifford appeared to know, indeed they had spoken of the place. Of the two it must be Hubert, for the other gentlemen she supposed ignorant of her particular haunts. Yet this seemed not like Hubert, and the thought flashed into her mind, could it be Sir Robert? He did not appear to notice her enough of late for that. "He would not take so much pains for any lady, and he calls me a child," she mused, while a half sigh escaped her lips.

Sir Robert's uniform kindness since the morning of the Alwick party, had not satisfied her as she supposed it would when troubled in consequence of his fancied displeasure. She would seek the lady mother, who had so often given her good and wise counsel, then she trusted the unquiet spirit would disappear. After a while peaceful thoughts stole into and soothed her mind, the discontent vanished.

After a short time Mabel became aware some person had entered the room. Supposing it to be a servant, or some one in search of an article left behind, she remained perfectly still in order to escape observation. Whoever it was, approached the place where she was sitting, then halted suddenly as if just observing there was some person in the room. Her head was bowed down as she slept; after listening for a moment the figure approached gently to Mabel's side and stopped. She did not look up—did not move. Presently a hand was placed upon the chair very near, and rested there. The moonbeams flashed brightly on a diamond ring on one of the fingers—steadily, clearly, like a star of promise, it remained unmoving. Mabel closed her eyes from that excess of light. She knew the ring, and whose the hand that wore it, yet it seemed half a dream—that still late hour, the moonlight trees making soft shadows on the lawn—no sound but the shrill cry of a distant night-bird, and that figure as motionless watching over her. A spell seemed gathering about her—she might have slept, and she never had dreamed, so strangely passed the time.

Then it seemed the figure was bending over her, the hand had moved from her side and was placed with the other gently upon her fair curls, while a whispered voice murmured "Heaven bless thee, Mabel, my Mabel." Then there were retreating footsteps and it was still again.

The young girl started to her feet, it had grown late, very late. The long stream of moonlight had changed its position and lighted a far distant corner.

She looked like a stray spirit flitting through the rooms and up the wide stair-case. A dark figure stood in the doorway, her head again her room, and then the echoing tread of footsteps was heard through the empty corridors which led in the direction of the chapel and gallery, until it died away in the eastern wing.

CHAPTER III.

Never a fairer morning dawned than that which Mistress Alice claimed as her natal day. A group of fair girls in their morning robes, began early besieging her door to gain entrance, and now with gay wit, laughter and frolic, made the walls ring again.

Separated from Alice's chamber only by a dressing-room, Mabel was awakened by their merry peals just as Alice came dancing into the room, the rest running to the door and peeping in, roughly waiting to be invited.

"O thou blessed, quiet one," exclaimed Alice, throwing aside the rose-tinted curtains of Mabel's couch, and stooping to give her a warm kiss. Then tilting the white drapery in fantastic form around her face, she laughingly called out:

"Come hither, my maidens, say you ever such a tint on my rose-bud's cheek? She must have been dreaming of the fairies."

"Thou art fair enough to make one dream," she answered, not without a blush though, for an unwonted gladness had flashed into her mind with the first waking consciousness, and there was a flush of joy upon her cheek which seemed the fulfillment of her wish's blessing.

"If you bind me down thus with your white arms, I shall never be equipped for the wondrous doings of to-day."

"True, my Mabel, so speed thee in thy dressing. Look yonder, where waves our banner above the marquee between the trees. Good old Adam has surprised himself. The green sword for the shooting ground is shaven so closely, it looks like the light, every hair has been beguiled to come and shade us in a wondrous manner."

"What have we here?" asked Alice, a short time after, as her waiting-maid came forward, bearing in each hand a small inland casket, which she had just taken from the hand of a serving-man at the door.

"From the young ladies, and he wishes them a very happy day," said the woman, as she handed them, one to Alice and the other to Mabel. Lady Alice with eyes full of pleasure and curiosity, seized upon the silver key fastened to the side, and hurriedly threw open the case. Bright as drops of fire were the glowing rubies which met their eager gaze, set

with small diamonds which showed to advantage their exquisite color. Nothing could be richer or more brilliant. Alice clasped the bracelets upon her finely turned arms and the necklace about her throat, where each seemed made to rest, so much did they enhance her glowing beauty.

After admiring them herself and being admired by all the rest, she turned abruptly to Mabel, who had sat quietly watching Alice, with her own casket resting on her lap unopened.

"Now darling, try unclasp your little hands, and let us see, have you no curiosity yours?" Mabel smiled, and yielded the box to Alice, who, kneeling by her side, quickly turned the lock.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed every one. Beautiful indeed. Resting upon their bed of white satin was a full set of pearls and emeralds, set in a manner novel as it was beautiful. The jewels resting on a network of gold which formed the different pieces, were made to represent bunches of lilies of the valley, pearls making the white drooping bells and the glittering emerald the long fern-like leaf. Alice looked on a moment without speaking, then glancing up at Mabel, whose eyes were half filled with tears, she said in a serious, convincing manner:

"Yes, my good uncle improves, he begins to appreciate my pet."

"What, crying? O, well, then," making a feint to take away the box, "I will tell him you do not wish them—they make you unhappy!" Mabel felt the kindness deeply. It was not her birthday, and even were, this beautiful and delicate gift, selected with a view to her taste, was an attention she could not have anticipated.

The jewels were at length put aside, as the place began to be astir, and every one was alive with enjoyment at Stafford House. Alice seemed to vie with Mabel in the kindly effort of bringing together those who would be happiest in each other's company. As it was necessary for each lady formally to choose a knight who should be her armor-bearer for the day, many a demand, without their delicate interference, would have had to choose the one whose name she could pronounce without a blush, and been too proportionately unhappy. The bright Alice, who was the coquette too, to Sir Thomas, who had cleverly managed to select himself as her armor-bearer by seizing every arrow belonging to her early in the day. She had chosen Hubert too, for Mabel, and on seeing him watching her with rather a saddened countenance, she went to acquaint him of his good fortune, adding gaily, as she left, "fairer heart never wins, let me tell thee that, Sir Hubert."

Passing in the direction of her uncle's rooms, she met him coming out. Crossing Sir Robert with a smile and half a sigh, she said:

"Now just please, uncle mine, condescend to our revels to-day—we want you to crown the victor. You may not have me another birthday."

"Shall I not have thee, dear Alice? I do not wish to lose my children."

"But you will marry me, you know," she answered archly. "I promised we should be taken off within the year."

"Then you are quite as happy as you look!" he asked, glancing inquiringly at his niece.

"Yes, dear uncle, quite, I assure you."

"I suppose, then, I should be satisfied."

"Indeed, you may. Mabel and I are happy as heart could wish, or eye may, or mind miss." Saying this she tossed towards him a wreath of white roses, begging him to seek Mabel and give it to her. "You will find her at the great oak; she went that way a while since with Falconbridge."

Stafford took the wreath and went in the direction of the chapel. Entering the hall he looked at the chandelier, while a half smile played over his features, then lifting it, he deposited it gently on the head of a Psyche that stood on a pedestal near the door.

Alice happening to remember it the next morning, wondered if Mabel received it; and the maid who removed its withered glories from the head of the statue, supposed it part of the floral decorations which had been distributed with similar hands.

The grounds of Stafford House presented a brilliant scene as the gay groups became more numerous, and parties from the neighboring country-seats were constantly arriving. Small white tents were scattered here and there among the trees, containing seats for shelter and repose. Above each of these fluttered in the breeze a flag bearing some quaint device.

Long tables shaded by canopies were spread with refreshments for the peasantry. Alice was expected after greeting all the strangers who were expected to arrive, withdrew, and seated herself beneath a linden on one side of the enclosure reserved for the shooting ground, which they made their head-quarters.

Clifford and Falconbridge came up almost immediately, and Mabel's countenance fell a little as Sir Thomas acquainted them that Stafford had deputed him to crown the victorious lady.

"Yes," laughingly chimed in Falconbridge, "we have just left him conning the pages of a Plato, as coolly unconcerned as if there were nothing to tempt him beyond the walls, or away from that respectable ancient's musty philosophy."

All laughed at Hubert's raillery but Mabel, who, at the appointed signal the shooting commenced with spirit, while cheers announced the skill of each fair marksman. The Lady Alice and Clifford left their companions and stationed themselves at the proper place for careful observation. Mabel did not wish at once to mingle with the crowd, preferring to remain there where was an excellent view, until her turn came.

Hubert laid aside his light, every now and then daily tipped arrows destined for her use, and leaning himself against the tree, engaged in animated conversation. Mabel felt it to be a sort of necessity for that day, receiving his attention with unusual ease and freedom. Thereupon Falconbridge, to whom success had never yet said nay, built a tower of his wondrous high and strove to fancy himself very near the cap-stone.

Soon a messenger came from Lady Alice, saying it was already her turn, and as Mabel would come directly after, she begged her to be in readiness. Hubert quickly gathered up the arrows, and accompanied her to where Alice and Sir Thomas were the centre of a merry crowd, near the well-tended target.

It was the privilege of each person to let fly three arrows. When the Lady Alice's three had sped, and Mabel commenced, it was plainly seen that the greatest triumph of skill would lie between the two.

The first rivalled in precision the Lady Alice's best. The second hardly went as well, Mabel having just as she shook back her light curls, and steadied herself for an aim, caught sight of Stafford, who was standing with several other gentlemen watching her. Blushing to think she should fail, Mabel quickly caught the remaining arrow from Hubert's hand, and placed it on the string. Drawing it up tightly, she was just about to launch it from the bow, when the arrow glanced aside and coming back with full force, struck Mabel violently in the throat.

Stafford saw it instantly, and gained the arena almost at one bound. It was too late. Hubert had caught her in his arms, and she lay dead, deadly pale, and the crowd parting on either side made way, as he bore his unconscious burden to the marquee beneath the linden. Alice was at her side in an instant, losing her bodily, bathing her temples, and using every means to restore her. After a few minutes she partially recovered, and then relapsed into a deeper swoon.

Sir Robert had judged that any one of the violence of the blow, and with a pang at seeing her borne away by Hubert, he did not follow, but despatched at once several serving men to the abbey for a leech. Yet he did not know the full extent of the injury, and pacing up and down the greensward, he anxiously awaited the news of her returning consciousness.

The look of stern anxiety with which Falconbridge had borne her from the ground, revealed most clearly to Sir Robert the hold the fair girl had upon the young knight's affection. This held him back as with an iron grasp. It was Hubert's privilege to be at her side, to watch and anticipate her wishes. The thought flashed his spirit, and he laid no claim to such patience as would enable him to be witness to this latest scene.

In a few moments Sir Thomas Clifford was seen coming from the marquee with a countenance full of anxiety—he hurried towards Stafford, who joined him at once.

"You have some skill as a leech, Stafford," he hastily exclaimed. "I pray you come this way instantly."

Without stopping for a moment, they hastened towards the spot where Mabel was lying, cold and motionless. Sir Robert questioned, and no one, but thrusting them all aside, saw at a glance what was necessary to be done.

The swoon had been already fearfully protracted, and unless some blood were taken at once, the consequences might be disastrous. With one look at her pale face, Stafford drew from his breast a small, glittering dagger; at one rent he cut away the drapery from her neck, and with a steady hand thrust its point into one of the blue veins which showed so clearly through the skin.

Kneeling at her side, he gazed intently to see the first signs of returning life. The blood flowed slowly at first, then more rapidly, as the heart's beating quickened the returning tide, and began to show its color in her paler limbs.

Mabel opened her eyes, and then half opened her eyes, but as if the effort were too much, she closed them again with a faint moan. Sir Robert piled the cushions which formed the couch, to make a more comfortable resting place, with all the tenderness and care of a woman, then lifting the soft, silken hair from about her neck, disclosed the wound made by the arrow, now beginning to bleed freely. Alice shuddered at the sight, as she stooped to give her uncle a handkerchief to staunch the blood.

Every one remained silent, not offering a word of advice, so evident was it that Stafford understood the case, and was fully competent to take charge of the poor girl. Hubert, pale and anxious, had withdrawn to the farther end of the marquee, yet with his sight, that the air might reach her unimpeded, watching the effects of Stafford's skill.

Ever prompt and thoughtful when called upon to act, Sir Robert on first seeing Mabel had ordered a litter from the house instantly, and the men were already waiting with it outside.

Mabel had not spoken, but the more peaceful breathing and returning color made him judge it safe to have her removed. This change had no bad effect, but a chill seemed to creep over her, and shuddering slightly, she murmured, faintly, "Cold, very cold." Alice took a large cashmere which Mrs. Bertram had procured to send out, and wrapped her carefully in it, while Stafford supported her tenderly in his strong arms, as if she were an infant. The litter was prepared, and he carried Mabel to where it stood. The fresh air revived her, and opening her eyes, she looked up with a bewildered expression, that changed into a faint smile as she met the anxious gaze of her guardian and Lady Alice.

On turning her head slightly, a look of pain passed over her features, and she again closed her eyes. Stafford would not trust the serving men to bear the litter on which Mabel was laid, and Hubert quickly sprang forward, with Sir Thomas Clifford and several others to assist him. He motioned all away but Falconbridge, to whom he assigned the foot, while with an expression of determination which seemed to say he had already neglected her too much, he maintained his position at the head. On arriving at the house, the surgeon who had arrived, seeing all was being properly done, voiced until the patient could be taken to her room, before he attempted to examine the wound.

Mrs. Bertram led the way with Mabel's maid, whose eyes were red with crying, while Lady Alice followed them with a saddened countenance. The door of Mabel's room was thrown open, and Stafford, who had lifted her carefully from the litter, and up the staircase, entered, and placed her, weak and helpless, upon the bed.

The physician was at once in attendance, and Stafford turning to leave the room, with a last, anxious glance at Mabel, hastily whispered to him to send word immediately when he should ascertain the probable danger from the wound.

The principal part of the company disappeared from Stafford House on the event of Mabel's mishap. Clifford and Falconbridge yet lingered, feeling they had deeper interest there than others. Lady Alice, whose own acceptance Clifford had already gained, notwithstanding his entreaties, would not hear of his making a formal declaration to her uncle until Mabel were quite well.

The summer days sped along swiftly, and the fair girl was rapidly recovering from the prostration consequent upon her illness. Every day her guardian had been himself, morning and evening, to the door of her room, to inquire of the attendant how she was getting on, at the same time bearing faithfully every message with which Hubert might entrust him.

At last one evening she bade Alice say she should be down stairs again in one or two days at most. Alice gave her an affectionate caress, hoped she would credit to her good nursing, and bade her to wait in the great hall, to walk upon the terrace, which Mabel would never hear of her omitting.

Sir Thomas soon joined her. After a time she blushing told him Mabel would be down now in a few days. Knowing he would seek upon this to obtain her permission to speak to Sir Robert, she talked away very hastily, not giving him time to utter a syllable. He succeeded in speaking, however, and after many a protest and demur, obtained her reluctant consent. Not that she did not love Sir Thomas, and with the earnestness, too, of first affection, which, however untrue it may be in many cases, is nevertheless, very sweet. But she was not one to say yes readily, and to yield up her poor prized independence. After the first word was given, she laughingly told him she could not feel quite at ease until there was a good opportunity to disobey him.

Clifford resolved to speak to Sir Robert at once, as he intended afterwards leaving Stafford House for a short time, until he should return and claim his sole remaining daughter. This resolve he communicated to Falconbridge, who wished to govern his own movements in some degree by Clifford's. He had been full of anxiety during Mabel's illness, with now and then a mingling, but his own ardent love and hope buoyed him up, and he now resolved to ask Sir Robert's permission to gain the Lady Mabel's hand, and with this seek an auspicious moment to declare his love to the gentle girl herself.

The next morning Mabel was reclining upon a sofa, and looking out of the window at their room, slightly pale, and looking more delicate from illness. The cool air of morning breathing on its wings the scent of wild flowers, stole in and ruffled the leaves of the book she was reading, and made her long for a walk through the leafy woods. Alice was sitting about the room intent on anything which required action.

Clifford entered, and Mabel looked up at him. Taking it from his hand, she looked at the writing outside, and coloring, walked soberly to a distant seat at the other end of the room. Mabel followed her with a look of inquiry. Opening the note, whose contents she more than guessed, she read as follows:

"DEAR ALICE—Will you not come to me upon the terrace to-day, and tell me what Sir Robert, and an impatient to see you. Clifford, dearest."

[CONCLUDED ON NEXT PAGE.]

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